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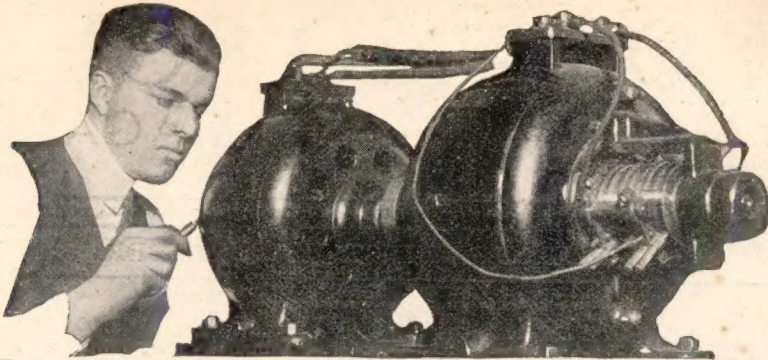


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TOP - NOTCH

TWICE-A-MONTH

MAGAZINE

Volume LXXVIII

Number 3

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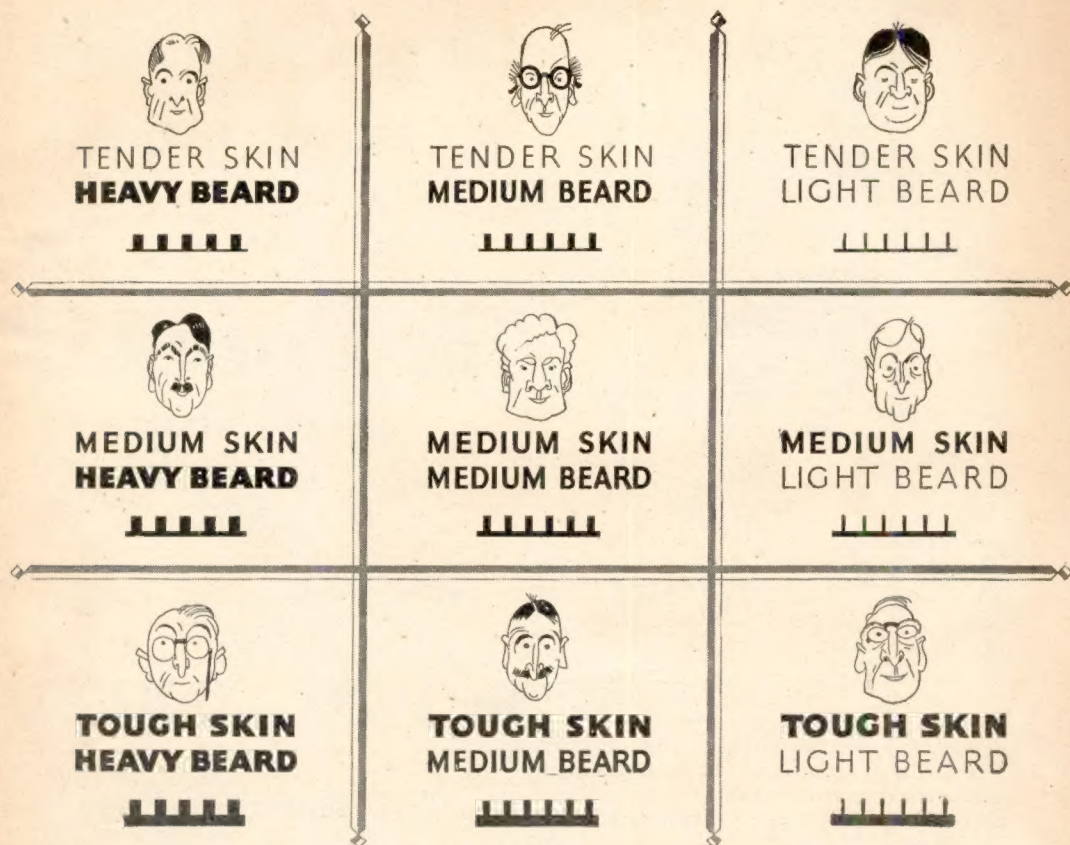
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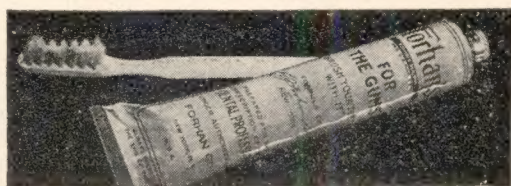
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Flaming Sands

By Albert M. Treynor

A SERIAL—PART I

CHAPTER I.

IN BONDAGE.

AT sundown in the desert, when all the good noses of Islam should be down in the sand, the evening mirage reflects the likeness of the country half-a-night's journey ahead. If the day be hot and clear, as the days almost always are in the Sahara, the watcher at twilight may see the wavering, upside-down images of whatever there is to see on the other side of the dunes, six or eight miles away.

So in the muezzin hour it was the habit of the Ras Tagar Kreddache, the Zouais sheik, to keep his scimitarlike nose in the air while he scanned the primrose haze of the horizon with his fierce, falcon eyes.

This night he saw little, topsy-turvy figures, no bigger than flies on a ceil-

ing, walking ridiculously with their feet in the sky and their heads hanging toward the ground—men and camels, camels and men—a caravan on the long, long route from Nubia.

Tagar's raiders huddled behind him in the shadows of the steep *gherds* of sand. Men of prey, mounted on fast-trotting camels, they could "eat up" a caravan in the next morning's dawn, and vanish like water sucked into the shifting dunes.

The far-off figurines were going into camp. Tagar's full, red lips twitched wickedly under his ace-of-spades beard as he gave the command to his own men to *barrak* for the evening. At one o'clock in the morning they all would be in the saddle again, and strike, as was their custom, when their victims were slumbering in the hour of soundest sleep that just precedes the dawn.

The mirage soon faded and was

washed away in the tender-pink glow of the sky. But the ras had marked well his points of direction. He would know which way to lead his padding *harka* of camelmen when the midnight stars were twinkling.

Slaves had pitched the camel's-hair tent, the chieftain's purple-dyed *beit esh shar*, while he was dismounting. He left off his blue-kid riding slippers and walked majestically under cover to await the cooking and serving of the evening meal.

There were five slaves in Tagar's fighting *harka*. Three of them were black, sleek-bodied Bongas from Ethiopia; one was a straight-haired Tebu of the ancient desert blood; the fifth was a white man.

The British, the French and the Italians, whose settlements lie along the borders of the Sahara, have forbidden slave dealing among the caravans. As well try to coerce the gadflies of Ribiana or forbid the ants of Dakhla from burrowing in the sand. There are ten million square miles of untouched, trackless land that make up the desert wastes of northern Africa.

Now and then a white-helmeted camel corps or a battalion of *légionnaires* will make a short dash into the country of thirst and back again. The mid-desert dwellers do not even hear of this event! Tagar did as he pleased with his slaves, as his forefathers had done for eons.

In the *zariba* square of packs and saddles, tiny fires began to crackle. The night breeze carried the mingled savors of mint, and tea and olive oil, of red peppers and sizzling, fat mutton chops. Tagar appeared in his tent door and clapped his hands.

The nearest slave was the white man. He came promptly, in well-schooled humility, as it behooved him to do.

Tagar's eyebrows bristled malignantly. The blacks were simply slaves, but this man was of the loathed Rumi,

a bleached-out unbeliever, an affront in the chieftain's sight.

"Dog!" he said. "Fetch my egg."

Save for a crimson loin cloth, the slave stood naked before his owner. Six feet of lithe, cleanly formed muscle and bone, this man was an arresting figure even among the lean, swaggering fighters of Tagar's hard-conditioned Zouais.

His sun-scorched body gleamed in the dying daylight like polished, beautifully carved mahogany. Up to the last, audacious instant his bold, slate-colored eyes weathered Tagar's formidable stare.

Then his head went down in an easy, graceful bending that was dangerously close to burlesque. He spread his arms before him and backed away.

That afternoon one of the men had dug out an ostrich's nest. Some of the eggs were quite fresh. Tagar could eat a whole baked egg himself, any time. The Caucasian slave pulled one egg out of the ashes and bore it in his calloused hands, smoking hot, to Tagar.

The ras looked suspiciously genial while he waited to see how long his man could endure the blistering heat. Suddenly he stepped forward to press the slave's elbows against his bare chest. The egg just touched the tip of the white man's nose.

"*Inshalla!*" Tagar's shout broke up the camp-fire groups. He drew backward a pace and slipped the keen blade of his yataghan from its velvet sheath. "Witness the Ras Tagar prepare to eat an egg," he cried.

Men came from all sides and pressed grinning faces around the purple tent.

"You, Mansor," he said to one of the party, who carried the fork-tongued slave whip coiled over one shoulder. "Watch this slave's eyes. If he blinks, he lacks faith in Tagar's sword and deserves to be beaten for cowardice and unfaith."

Tagar's sinewy wrist whipped back

behind his shoulder. The honed blade slashed the air, whistling. There was a tense silence for a second afterward, followed by boisterous applause.

The needle-pointed yataghan had barely flicked the skin of the slave's forehead, while the apex of the ostrich egg was taken off as neatly as the top of a trephined skull.

The slave stood erect, holding the egg, and looked at the ras.

"Give it to the black man with the silver dish," commanded Tagar petulantly, and turned into his tent.

Outside the inclosed *zariba*, a half hour later, the five slaves squatted down to their own meal. Mansor doled out to them a dozen dates apiece and from a half-full *girba* poured for each as much water as a man can hold in his cupped hands. This was their daily drink.

The brief span of twilight held the sound of lax voices murmuring inside the square. Soon the fires faded out. The indolent talk changed by degrees to snoring. The cool desert night came west across the dunes.

THE Caucasian slave lay unclad and uncovered in the sand that had begun to lose its warmth. Wide-eyed, he gazed up at the stars in the marvelous blue-black sky.

"Caverly. Geraint Caverly. 'Rainy' Caverly."

Lately he had acquired the dangerous habit of talking to himself. In that direction, he knew, lay madness. What matter? In this stark loneliness he had to say something sometimes. The thick-skulled Bongas were too sullen for talk. The Tebu was dreaming of his distant home.

"Geraint Caverly, M. A., D. S., D. S. O."

Caverly had begun to believe that if he didn't say his own name once in a while, the memory of it would leave him one of these days.

There had been nearly two years of this. A prying archæology enthusiast, he had been poking around in the Tibesti Mountains where he had no business to be. A gang of veiled Touaregs picked him up and carried him off to a Lybian slave farm.

The Ras Tagar had purchased Caverly for fifty *mejadies* about twelve months ago in a bargain lot of slaves. A full-grown, able-bodied male slave usually brings one hundred *mejadies* in the Touareg markets, but the ras was a close dickerer. And it is well known that a white man almost always wilts in the desert before his full worth can be squeezed out of him.

Caverly's restless gaze shifted off to the glimmering horizon. They hadn't squeezed *him* out yet. He was as rebellious as he was the day Tagar bought him.

His spirit remained as strongly resistant as the lean, toughened body that would not cave in under cruelty and hardship, and the scourging desert sun. He could still laugh with a crooked, macabre humor at the crazy twists of things. This was the night he had waited for.

The strange caravan was encamped a half dozen miles away in the direction of Antares. Probably it was a group of robber merchants on the long journey to Koba. Ordinarily, a white man would receive scant courtesy from a band of mid-desert nomads.

These travelers, however, should be grateful for the warning brought to them. Certainly they would welcome an extra hand in the fighting at dawn. Caverly planned to reach the neighboring camp before midnight.

It was a simple enough matter to walk out of Tagar's camp. Nobody ever bothered to guard the slaves. To escape meant death, inevitable and horrible, or something worse than death.

In two years Caverly had known only one slave who had been driven by des-

peration to make the break. Caverly had seen all that was left alive of that man carried back to scream above the gate of the barracoon at Gazim.

CHAPTER II.

THE APPARITION.

THE men of Tagar's *harka*, in common with the beasts of prey, had the knack of taking their sleep in snatches when and where they might. There were dozens of white-shrouded forms sprawled here and there across the hollow of the dunes.

The only sounds to be heard were the heavy breathings of men asleep and the rubbery munching of the camels huddled darkly in the background. The figures of the two camel guards were barely discernible on the crest of the farther *gherd*.

Caverly left his slave companions snoring soddenly, and crept away behind the piles of baggage and big-bowed saddles. He had no weapon, and no clothing but his loin cloth.

For a moment he entertained a notion that he might attempt to "lift" a dagger or musket, and perhaps, a wool *jebalai* from one of the sleepers. The risk was too great. He changed his mind.

As he crept along the outer flank of the *zariba*, one of the Bonga slaves stirred and lifted his head. Caverly was watching the sentinels on the hill. He was unaware of the slight movement behind him.

He reached the end of the camel lines and flattened his bare chest in the sand. One of the camels tested the air with his nose, and jumped up, snorting. A guard's sandals grated in the sand, not a dozen feet from Caverly's head.

The American held his breath while the picket's singsong voice tried to soothe the disturbed camel. There was a grunt and a soft thud as a ton's weight of shaggy body sat down again,

and then the *tap, tap, tap* of a musket butt, driving the *agal* pin deeper into the ground.

The sentinel went back to his observation post. Caverly started to crawl once more down the trough of the dunes.

This neighborhood was infested with Cleopatra's asps. He had seen dozens of these snakes that afternoon, twining in the heat. His attention was divided acutely between the two white-robed figures on the hill above him, and the shadowy ground over which his body was wriggling.

His hands groped gingerly through the cooling sand as he inched his way along the bottom of the draw. Something lashed in the dust and shunted out from under his reaching fingers. He went rigid and cold.

It was a horrid business, this naked squirming in a dark gully, as though he himself were an asp. But he couldn't stay here. The sky was brightening in the east as the full moon came up. And a Caucasian's skin has too high a visibility in the moonlight.

He crawled the last two or three rods with a prayer in his heart, and a shrinking in his flesh. At last the gray shoulder of the dune bulged between the bottom draw and the camel pickets. It was in good time. The top segment of the moon was up above the desert edge.

Caverly straightened on his feet and looked behind him. The sleeping *duar* of the Zouais was tucked out of sight in a fold of the ground. If he hadn't just left the encampment, he never would have dreamed there was a man or a camel within a hundred miles.

He scowled back at the dunes. Then he turned his face to Antares' ruddy beam and set off at a half trot across the wind-rippled sands.

Caverly had laid his plans a long while ago. Days and nights his mutinous eyes had scanned the emptiness of the desert for the caravan that some

time must come along. A man alone, even with camels and weapons, and a full canteen could never hope to traverse that menacing desolation.

The children of the sun always band together in big groups when they venture out on the long routes. If you live, you do not travel alone.

Whoever these strangers might be, Caverly would throw his fortunes in with theirs. They would have to fight in the coming dawn. He conceded them scarcely one chance in a thousand to stave off Tagar's smashing charge.

That slight chance was all he could reasonably ask on his own account.

A man's freedom is the most magnificent thing he can have. Caverly's lungs expanded. There was laughter in his eyes. No weariness was left in him. His toes burrowed pleasantly in the sand. He ran, not because there was need of haste, but because he felt like running. He could have danced in the moonlight.

Caverly looked back now and then at the full, round moon. Once he thought he saw a movement against the sky line, off toward Tagar's camp. He crouched and waited, but nothing showed itself.

Perhaps a leopard had prowled across the ridge, or an antelope had changed his bed.

He must have come a couple of miles from his starting place. There was little likelihood that any of the Zouais would be prowling so far from their camp unless one of the sleepers had awakened and had discovered the departing barefoot trail.

In that event, an alarm would have been given and a dozen men would come galloping—not a single skulking figure on foot.

From now on, however, Caverly looked behind him oftener than he looked ahead.

Instead of following the undulations of ground, he held to a straight line,

dipping across hollows and climbing the ridges of the dunes. Antares, the fiery star of adventurers, gleamed red in his face.

He gained the top of a fifty-foot mound. From this vantage point he turned for the twentieth time to scan the country in the rear. There was nothing visible but the rolling, shimmering dunes. He went on over the hilltop, started down the next slope—and stopped.

Somebody was climbing up to the ridge from the opposite side, as he was about to go over it.

The instinct of escape is a primitive, savage obsession. Destroy any living thing that blocks the path! Caverly started to spring. He checked himself just in time.

The intruding shape was too slight and inconsiderable to look dangerous. It was not a full-grown man. Nor was it a boy.

The moonlight gave him the measure of a clean-legged figure in flaring riding pants, and a pert young face shadowed beneath the tilt of a white, pith helmet. He gaped as though his jaw had come unhinged. The apparition was a woman. Moreover, she was a white woman.

THEY stood three or four paces apart, held in a mutual astonishment. The girl must have been as startled by her encounter with a breech-clouted vagabond as Caverly was startled to see a woman of his own race in a place absolutely impossible for a white woman to be.

He'd have been less surprised if he'd run into a behemoth.

She was a valiant girl. She was not to be thrown off her poise by any hairy-faced wild man. "Put them up!" she said in English. "Throw them over your head!"

A short-barreled rifle which she was carrying leveled itself at the pit of

Caverly's stomach. The hammer *click-clicked*.

"You mean my hands?" he asked. "Why should I?"

"Up!" she snapped. "Stick them up!"

"Ridiculous! The only reason to make any one stick his hands up is to keep 'em out of the pockets. And nobody has pockets in his skin."

She looked at him sharply. "Who are you?" she demanded.

"One of the Ras Tagar Kreddache's slaves."

"A—what?"

"A slave."

"You mean, they keep—slaves?"

"Why not?"

Her long, vivid eyes examined him from head to foot, and then paused incredulously as they encountered his eyes. "You're a white man," she told him.

"I was."

"Where are your clothes?"

Caverly was quite accustomed to running around in this condition. "I haven't any," he told her without embarrassment.

"You haven't any—*clothes*?"

"Not now."

"Since when?"

"It's been a long while. I was at Yale and afterward at Oxford. Later I commanded a camel corps in Arabia, going up to Azrak behind Lawrence. I recall a talk I once gave before a scientific society in Boston, a dinner party in Paris, and a dance in Alexandria. I must have had clothes in those days."

The girl backed away a pace, as though she had decided suddenly that he was demented and unsafe. "What's your name?" she asked dubiously.

"I haven't so much as a cigarette or a match of my own to light one with."

She fumbled in the pocket of her tunic. A flat, gold case glinted in the moonlight. "Try one of these?"

"Thanks." He helped himself to a highly scented Cairo cigarette. "Now if you had a light——"

She reached gingerly toward him with a packet of matches in her slim fingers. "What's your name?" she asked again.

"Caverly."

"Caverly? Not——" The girl thrust up her helmet brim. She regarded him with intensified interest. "Not Geraint Caverly?"

"Yes. Rainy Caverly." The fact that she seemed to know who he was did not strike him just then as being of much moment. He struck a match and was very carefully lighting the end of his cigarette.

"Not really!" she exclaimed. There was a subtle change in her manner. A slight frostiness had crept into her voice.

Caverly was wholly absorbed in the almost-forgotten sensation of lighting an after-supper cigarette. He sighed and drew the sweetish smoke deep into his lungs.

"I'm acquainted with an acquaintance of yours," the girl remarked.

This didn't interest him much. He looked at the cigarette dubiously. "That's funny!" he said.

"Why is it funny? You were pretty well known once, before you disappeared. You must have had plenty of acquaintances."

"For the first three months," he remarked, "I thought I'd go crazy without something to smoke. And then I got over it. And now this thing doesn't taste right."

He gave her back her matches and dropped the cigarette in the sand. "Isn't that too bad? I'm cured of another vice."

"If you're a slave," she said, "what are you doing here?"

"I'm running away."

"From where?"

"From Tagar's camp. I suppose

you're from that caravan over there under the Scorpion's heart? We saw your mirage last evening."

The information of another desert encampment located only a few miles away did not seem to disturb her. "You were coming to us for protection, I suppose?"

"In a measure, yes. Any white men in your party?"

"One."

"He's a bigger fool than you are."

"What?"

"A man is supposed to have some sense."

"Really?" she said ironically.

"It's bad enough to bring a woman into this country. But to let her stroll out alone at night, as though it were Gramercy Park——"

"Nobody knows I'm out," she retorted. "It was simply too lovely to-night to sleep. So I got up and came for a walk." She stretched her supple young body and smiled willfully at the moon. "Nothing's going to hurt me."

"How many actual *men* are in your crowd?" he inquired.

"I think there are about a dozen—*men*."

"And Tagar has seventy! *El mak-tub mak-tub!* What is written is written."

He started to move forward. "Well, let's get on."

CHAPTER III.

STALKED ON THE DUNES.

AS Caverly went down the incline, he cast a last glance behind him. Then he ducked, and grabbed the girl's shoulder, dragging her down in the sand at his side.

"Let go!" She squirmed to free herself. "What do you mean?"

"Keep quiet!" He crept upward a few inches, until he could peer over the top of the ridge.

Something was coming toward him

across the dunes. He lay still for a moment, watching narrowly. The thing was moving in the shadows of the *gherds*, a grotesque, crouching shape, not entirely beastlike, not yet wholly human.

It was big and dark. It skulked along as the primates walk, its dangling arms reaching forward to the sand—following Caverly's glaring foot prints.

He had seen all that he needed to see. "Come on!" he whispered.

His grimness enforced obedience. Without a word the girl soft-footed it beside him to the bottom of the slope.

He told her to stay where she was, and crept around the hollow, back along the tongue of the dune. Presently the face of the moon was blocked out by the rising ground.

Flat on his chest he wriggled and hitched his way along. He gained the shady side of a sand hummock on the flank of his own trail. Here, in twilight, he hugged the ground and waited.

The approaching figure was forced to cross a stretch of bright shingle. It was a man—a black-skinned colossus—creeping stealthily over the dunes. Caverly knew that apelike shape.

This was Zanzan, one of the Bonga soldier slaves. A monster of brawny flesh, animated by an inhuman courage and cruelty. He had picked up a musket somewhere. He followed the barefoot trail, sinuously advancing.

Caverly heard the man's harsh, excited breathing as he came up. It sounded exactly as though Zanzan were running a ground scent. One slave tracking another!

Misery does not breed humanity or fellowship. If Zanzan halted or killed the runaway, who was in no sense his comrade, Tagar might reward him with a good dinner or a few days surcease from toil.

The man was intent on the clean line of toe marks. He did not see the

shadow flattened against the hummock at his left. On he went, sniffing at the ridge, keen to see what awaited in the hollow on the other side.

Caverly stood up as the man went by. The cushioning sand deadened the sound.

Some instinct of barbaric inheritance sounded a warning. The Bonga whirled. He snorted and fumbled at the hammer of his gun.

The lock of a percussion *moukala* is a stiff and awkward affair. Zanzan's thumb blundered the first attempt. The white man was closing in. Zanzan backed away, changing ends on his weapon. He swung with such fury that the whiz of the gun butt was audible in the air.

Caverly felt the wind as he ducked under the blow. His ironlike knuckles sank beneath the Bonga's ribs. Again he struck, straight and full-armed. His left fist, with a sinewy shoulder behind it, caught the point of a prognathous jaw. Zanzan's thick neck did not even bend.

He clubbed his musket again. Caverly clutched at the stock. He gripped it, threw the clumsy Bonga half off balance. Nobody could have wrested anything from those constricting black hands if they had been properly locked. But the flashing unexpectedness of the attack unsettled the slow-moving man.

Caverly twisted the gun out of the slave's firm grasp, and leaped lightly away.

He caught the gleam of yellowish eyes as Zanzan charged. The gun barrel, hitting the Bonga's skull, had the sound of a sledge rebounding from an unbreakable rock. Caverly smote the lowered head a second time, retreated hastily, cocking the gun.

Zanzan crouched, with his arms hanging to the sand. For a second he paused, his crafty eyes staring into the muzzle of the big-bored weapon.

He clasped his head in his hands, and collapsed suddenly in a groaning heap.

Caverly looked down skeptically at the fallen Bonga. He observed the heaving of the man's ribs, and pushed the big body warily with his foot. "Playing possum!" he declared.

The girl had come up behind him, stilled and breathless, staring over his shoulder.

"We have nothing to tie him up with," Caverly remarked. "We can't drag him with us. If we leave him here, he'll come out of his fake trance the minute we're gone, and run back to Tagar's camp. They'll ride us down before we can reach your camp.

"You might as well try to club a rhinoceros unconscious," Caverly mused. "On a quiet night like this, a gun shot would be heard for miles——"

He turned to the girl. "Let me have your knife."

"What?" she cried.

Over one shoulder, and buckled snugly at the line of the hips, she wore a leather belt, which gave her silhouette its soldierly smartness. This belt held cartridge clips on one side and, by the right hand, a sheath and a hunting knife.

Before she could realize what he was about, Caverly had moved beside her. He released the tab and calmly pulled out the knife.

"No!" Her eyes were growing wider.

He tried the edge of the sharp blade with his thumb, then turned his back.

"What are you going to do?" she gasped.

"Try to gain us a few more hours of life," he replied.

He slouched forward and stooped to the ground. His body hid that which was in front of him. She saw his shoulders, the smooth ripple of muscles. There were raw, triangular welts across his sunburned flesh, like the cuts of a forked whiplash. She saw his arm

go downward in a quick, decisive movement.

A blubbing voice suddenly filled the night, shrieking.

The girl's hands went to her ears to shut out the sound. Sobbing with horror she turned and fled in the moonlight.

LIGHTLY running footsteps overtook her. A gray shadow lengthened beside her.

"Here's your knife," said Caverly.

"Don't come near me!" she choked. "You—you——"

"Don't you want your knife?"

"No! Do you think I'd touch it—after——" She was panting, as though she'd been running like this for miles. "You—a white man—to—to cut his——"

The knife blade flickered in the moonlight as Caverly tossed it over the nearest dune. He glanced at her sideways.

"Throat?" he asked mildly.

Her lips were tightly compressed. She would not or could not reply.

"Why should I cut his throat? What a morbid little thing you are!"

"I heard it!" she accused him wildly.

"Did you ever hear anybody yell like that with his throat cut? Really! I only gashed the soles of his feet."

The girl checked her panic-stricken pace. There was a chilling look in her eyes. "What do you mean?" she inquired.

"Just that. He'll betray us to Tagar, but it'll take him several hours to get back to the *duar*, on his hands and knees. That'll give us time to warn your people and to throw up a few defenses."

"Oh, I see!" she said witheringly.

"He'll be able to walk again in a couple of weeks—but *not* to-night!"

She slowed down to a walk, but her moody, scornful gaze kept to the ground ahead.

Caverly smiled satirically. It was obvious that the girl was a newcomer in this savage, ruthless land. She could not even imagine the frightfulness of their fate if Tagar overtook them. Caverly had forestalled a terrible dénouement by an act of stern necessity.

Zanzan really ought to be grateful. The instinctive stalker must have sneaked off on the trail before his animal-like brain paused to wonder what might happen to him if the Zouais caught him at large in the desert with a stolen musket in his hands. At least he had a pair of slashed feet to prove that he was not willingly a party to another slave's escape.

Caverly might have explained all this to the girl. But he liked neither her tone nor her manner. Why should he justify himself to her?

"Slavery," she remarked abruptly, "is brutalizing—don't you think?"

"Oh, absolutely!" he agreed.

They walked along for a while in silence. Two or three times, when her companion seemed to be absorbed by the silvery magic of the landscape, the girl stole a sidewise glance toward him. His gaunt, boldly etched features remained sphinxlike, unreadable.

"The man I spoke of who knows you," she said, "is at our camp."

"Yes?"

"His name is Lontzen."

Caverly stopped dead. "You mean Carl Lontzen?"

"Surely."

CHAPTER IV.

TWISTED WORDS.

CAVERLY caught pace with the girl again and sauntered along beside her with the smoothly flowing movements of a man who has learned to walk, as his ancestors once did, in bare-footed friendliness with the earth.

"You and Carl Lontzen were in the Tibesti Mountains together."

"Lontzen was looking for oil wells," said Caverly. "I was looking for an old buried city. He found his oil, I believe, but I never found my beautiful city. Yes, we were together. A couple of fools believing in things. But we found out. White men don't go into Tibesti."

"You should have stayed with Carl," said the girl.

He stared at her. "I don't understand."

"Instead of clearing out on the only camel," she said coolly, "while Lontzen held the defile against the Touaregs who had attacked you."

"You mean——" He was astonished. "What *do* you mean?"

"Carl fought off the Touaregs, and escaped, and finally made his way afoot into British Sudan," she explained pointedly, "while you, who ran away, were caught. So they made a slave of you, did they?"

"Where did you hear that story?" he demanded.

"What story?"

"Is Carl Lontzen telling that yarn around?"

The girl smiled superciliously. "It's the truth, isn't it?"

Caverly squinted at her for a moment. He shook his head and eased his feelings with a short and cynical laugh. "Doesn't it seem a little more plausible that the man who escaped into Sudan was the man who sloped off on our only camel?" he asked.

Her pretty eyebrows lifted contemptuously. She was not a girl to mince words. "Carl said if you ever came back you'd probably try to lie out of it."

"And the man who was caught and sold into slavery," he added soberly, "was the one who stayed behind and tried to fight off the Touaregs."

She walked on with her chin high and the edge of her lips curled in a disdainful little smile.

"Why are you so quick to take Lontzen's word?" asked Caverly.

"Because I know him and like him," she replied. "And his word is perfectly good with me."

Caverly regarded her curiously. "I forgot to ask you who you are," he said.

"My name is Treves."

"Wait a minute!" He studied her impudent features as though he recognized for the first time that she had a personality of her own.

"Hasn't Carl Lontzen a cousin named Treves?" he inquired. "A girl who once was lost for three days on the Mediterranean in a seaplane? And who broke her leg and killed her hunter, not long afterward, taking the water jump at Whaddon? The Honorable Beverly Treves, isn't it?"

"Beverly is my sister," she said. "I'm only Boadecea. I'm Bo Treves."

"As long as Lontzen seems to have fought his way out," Caverly said, with just the faintest touch of irony, "why did he stick his head back into the tiger's mouth?"

"On your account," she informed him.

"You're telling me he came back here—for me?"

"That's what I'm telling you."

"How did he know where to find me?"

"He heard a rumor somewhere that there was a white man who was being held by Tagar Kreddache."

"And he thought it was I? He risked his life again to rescue *me*?" Caverly whistled softly. "This man is Carl Lontzen?"

"Do you find it strange that a decent white man should attempt the rescue of another white man with whom he had been in a tight corner?" Her glance was scathing. "I suppose you might think it strange!"

"Oh, I do. I find it exceedingly and decidedly strange."

Caverly stooped in his stride to pick up a round, shining pebble he saw in his path. He examined the little stone as though it were something of much interest. Then, with a freakish impulse, he threw it into the air, and ran and caught it again in one hand.

"What's the use bothering our heads over trifling things?" he remarked as the girl came up. "Nothing is terribly important. Nothing whatever can matter to any of us—after to-morrow morning."

THE *duar* of the intruding caravan sat in a deep hollow of sand, encircled by the scallops of the dunes. A pleasantly chosen site, considering only the advantage of shelter from winds and desert dust. To a militarist's eye, it was a death trap.

The little cluster of tents and baggage piles would be just a mouthful for Tagar's wolfish horde.

Caverly caught his first glimpse of the encampment from the top of a commanding hillock as he and Bo Treves came over the rise. He looked at the ground below him, shook his head, smiled the grim, lopsided smile of a man who knows that he has arrived at the last place he will ever see upon earth.

He and the girl went down the slope among the unquiet shapes of camels. Nobody challenged them. They crossed the hollow and passed down between the hives of stretched canvas. The girl scratched with her finger nail at the doorway of the largest tent.

"Carl!" she called softly.

"What? What is it?" The aroused voice within took on a sudden sharpness. "Who's there?"

"It's I. It's Bo. Listen, Carl! There's a man here to see you—a slave." She said the word as though she relished it, and lifted oblique eyes toward Caverly. "A slave belonging to Tagar Kreddache."

The stays of a camp cot creaked behind the canvas wall. "You don't say? Where did he come from, Bo? What does he want? How'd he get here?"

"He'll tell you. Want to see him?"

"Yes. Yes, I suppose so. Tell him to wait there."

"You wait here," the girl said to Caverly. "All right, Carl. Good night."

She turned on her heel and walked away without a backward glance, to disappear in her own tent farther along the row.

Instead of staying where he was told, Caverly lifted the door flap and stepped inside. The moonlight behind him gave enough illumination for him to see the dim interior, the hide trunk, the collapsible stand and washbasin, the two folding chairs holding neatly piled garments.

A burly, thick-necked figure sat up suddenly on the cot.

Lontzen appeared to be outraged by the invasion of his privacy. "Didn't I tell you to stay outside?" he snarled. "Keep the hell out of here!"

The trespasser reached calmly for a pair of riding breeches that hung from the back of one of the chairs. He slipped a foot into the opening of one trousers leg, balanced himself nicely, thrust in the other foot, and hauled them up.

"Pants," he declared, "are civilization's quaintest notions. They make life much too complex."

"What the——" The man on the cot lost his voice in the midst of a breath. He hoisted himself to his feet and gaped in an unutterable astonishment.

"Good evening, Lontzen."

Lontzen stood perfectly still as he tried to see the newcomer's face behind its bushy, unkempt beard. "It's—is it? Caverly! It's Rainy Caverly!"

"What size collar do you wear?" inquired Caverly. "About an eighteen?"

He appropriated the soft, tan shirt that went with the breeches, and shoved his arms into the sleeves. "An eighteen'll give me a scrawny look," he remarked through the folds of linen. "I was a sixteen the last time I had on a shirt. I've dried out since then."

"Caverly—what are you doing here? Where did you come from?"

Lontzen fumbled toward the stand, found a candle and matches. He struck a light, but for a moment his hand was so unsteady he was unable to bring the flame and the wick together.

"What's this yarn you've been telling, Carl, about our little mishap in Tibesti?" Caverly buttoned the shirt and buckled up the belt. Then he sat down.

At his second attempt Lontzen succeeded in igniting the candle. He faced the other man with a measure of brassy assurance. When their eyes met, his were the first to turn away.

"How are you, Rainy?" he asked. "I'm certainly glad to see you alive and well. What did they do to you? Were you really a slave? How did you get away? I'm on my way in to see if I could find you. I had hoped to be able to buy your release."

Caverly interrupted the overhurried flow of words. "Did you tell your cousin that it was *I* who sneaked off and left *you* holding the bag for that gang of Touaregs?"

The desert is like a fusing furnace that tries human metals in the raw. Tossed into a fiery alembic of life among hot-blooded, lawless people, a white man reacts in one of two ways. The tempering either produces flawless, superfine steel, or it turns out base metal and slag.

Carl Lontzen's quality was not superfine, nor even fine. He came of an honorable, well-bred line, but he had wandered far and deviously. Africa had taken almost everything from him, except his instinct of self-indulgence.

He was a big man, and he still was a handsome man, although his jawl was growing too heavy and his color a bit too florid; his eyes too hard and his mouth too slack.

CHAPTER V.

DEATH TRAP.

THAT business back there in the mountains," Lontzen said with a short, rasping laugh. "It's my word against yours, you know."

Caverly's keen eyebrows lifted a trifle. "Oh, yes. Among other people it is. But just between you and me—not! We know what happened, don't we? You and I know which one of us lost his nerve and sneaked and left a comrade in the lurch, to be sold as a slave."

"I came back for you, didn't I?" asked Lontzen loftily.

"Did you? Well, that ought to square your conscience a little for to-night. And after sunup to-morrow, you won't need to worry. You won't have any conscience, or anything else—after the sun comes up."

Lontzen stared sharply. "You—what do you mean by that?"

"The Ras Tagar with seventy raiders is parked off in the dunes about eight miles from here. They're Zouais, my friend, and you know what that means. Just one gulp, and we'll all be gone."

"Oh, the Ras Tagar," said Lontzen carelessly. "I'm not afraid of Tagar."

"You're not afraid?"

Lontzen snapped his fingers in the air. "I think no more of Tagar than that!"

It was Caverly's turn to stare. "You've changed a lot since I last saw you."

Lontzen shrugged his powerful shoulders. He sat down and fixed his visitor with a calculating glance. "You remember that oil ground we found back there in Tibesti?" he demanded.

"Rather! I have every reason to remember it. That was where the Touaregs picked me up."

"If we had some way of getting that oil out we'd be multimillionaires."

"A short life and a merry one!" Caverly grinned ironically. "Multimillionaires to-night and dead men to-morrow."

"No. Listen! I mean it. Remember the well of water we found near the petroleum fields—the well from which we bucketed out some little fish, which you said were known to live only in streams in central Africa? You called 'em——"

Caverly was beginning to look bewildered. "In heaven's name, what have fish got to do with anything?"

"And you said you'd found the same kind of fish in other wells, across the desert beyond Kufara," Lontzen went on earnestly. "You deduced from the finding of these fish that many of the Sahara oases are watered by a network of underground streams; that these streams flow into a main subterranean channel, which eventually finds its outlet in the Nile."

"Many geologists agree on this sub-way-river theory," said Caverly.

"I know they do," declared Lontzen. "I've talked with a few lately who assure me that our Tibesti well undoubtedly is a part of the system. Anything dumped into it ought to come out in the Nile."

"Here's what I'm arriving at," Lontzen pursued. "It would be impossible to develop those petroleum fields, because you couldn't carry the stuff to the coast. You couldn't lay pipe lines through the territory of a score of murderous desert tribes, even if you could stand the expense."

CAVERLY had found a pair of shoes and was stooping to pull them on his feet. He was only half listening. "Rave on!" he muttered.

"Oil floats on water," Lontzen was explaining. "If we were to open one of those Tibesti gushers and run a few millions of barrels of petroleum into the well where we caught the fish, it would be carried off under the desert and discharged at a navigable outlet. We'd build a spillway there, where it'd skim itself off, dig a catch basin for it, and pump it into tank boats——"

"What magnificent ideas you have!" Caverly broke in. "It's a pity you won't live to find out if they'll work."

"Why won't I?" demanded Lontzen truculently.

"I've warned you," said Caverly in exasperation, "that a band of Zouais are preparing to crash down on this *duar* at dawn. Do you imagine you stand a chance——"

"And I've told you that I'm not worrying about Tagar," Lontzen interposed. He smiled with superiority. "The ras' son is with me."

"Who?" Caverly cried. "Not—the sidi——"

"The Sidi Sassi Kreddache."

"But—he's in Europe. His father sent him away when he was a child, to get a white man's education. Even a slave hears the gossip at Gazim. The old man always has had an itch for conquest. He wants to be sheik over some of the neighboring towns."

"So he sent the young hopeful abroad to learn European fighting methods—to come back a military genius. There'll be the devil to pay in this neck of the desert when the war-trained sidi gets home."

"He has his education," said Lontzen. "He's on his way home."

Caverly scowled at the tent door. "That does put a different complexion on things. You say the sidi's here now, in this camp?"

Lontzen nodded contentedly. "He's asleep in the tent next to this one." He lowered his voice a trifle, grinned crookedly. "He's a grown man now."

Tagar is going to be frightfully disappointed in his son.

"I met the sidi in Paris. He prefers European pleasures to African warfare. He wasn't even coming back here. But he wants big money, just as I do. Understand? We've gone partners in this oil business."

Caverly's lips formed in a soundless whistle. "I see. So that's how you got up your bravery to come back! The sidi will protect you."

Lontzen ignored the slurring remark. "Do you know the way back to those Tibesti oil fields?"

Caverly's eyelids flickered. Otherwise his expression remained unchanged. "Don't you remember the way?"

"Well—no. I'm not sure that I know the route. The trail we followed through those mountains was like a jigsaw puzzle."

"And you were so busy escaping the Touaregs you didn't stop to notice landmarks," said Caverly pleasantly.

"You always had an eye for landscapes," observed the other man insinuatingly. "You'd be able to retrace the old route for us, wouldn't you?"

"We've smoked out the rat!" declared Caverly. "So that's why! Our heroic rescuer didn't come to deliver his comrade. He wants a guide."

"Can you lead us to that oil ground?" Lontzen snapped.

"Yes."

"Good! That's splendid!"

"Why?"

The look of satisfaction abruptly faded from Lontzen's face. His eyes glinted dangerously. "What do you mean by that?"

"I can't believe," said Caverly gravely, "that you've stopped to think of the consequences if you were to dump a river of petroleum into the desert's water supply system. Have you?"

"I've thought of everything!"

"Scores of mid-desert villages are dependent for life on their springs," mused Caverly. "I don't know whether your scheme would work or not. It might. If it did, you foresee what would happen? The drinking wells of the Sahara polluted with horrible crude oil! The linked chains of oases drying and shriveling for the lack of irrigation! People gasping for water! Villages inhabited only by the dead!"

Caverly shot a quizzical glance across the tent. "If the desert artesian supply is connected up by a big underground system, as we believe it is, that's what would happen."

"All right," said Lontzen.

Caverly straightened in his chair. "You'd risk that?"

"Am I to blame if the tribes live in the oases?"

"Gad, Lontzen! When you aristocrats turn rotten you turn all the way, don't you? Does the Sidi Sassi feel about it as you do?"

"Sassi doesn't care any more than I do about a few desert mongrels."

"Mongrels? Arabs? Bedouins? Indeed! Just where will you find purer blood——"

"They're anachronisms anyhow," was the contemptuous interruption. "Tenth-century savages living in the twentieth century!"

"So you, of course, are a thousand years better than they are!" Caverly smiled at his companion as though he were looking at something droll and, at the same time, pitiable. "I guess I haven't moved up as far as you have. I must be a tenth-century man."

"I didn't run a caravan eight hundred miles to listen to a moralist's driveling," snarled Lontzen. "I'm just asking you—are you going to guide me back to those petroleum fields?"

"No," said Caverly.

"The hell you're not!"

"No!"

Lontzen stumbled to his feet and

swelled up to his full girth and stature. His eyes peered unfeelingly between slits of eyelids. His mouth was shapeless and uncontrolled. Baseness and pettishness and sneering ill will ravaged the face, in the yellow candlelight, like disfiguring scars.

"You'll do as I tell you," Lontzen said very slowly. "If you don't come in as a partner, you'll come in as a slave. I'll buy you! You'll come along like a piece of property. And you'll show us that route!"

"No," said Caverly.

Lontzen was breathing harder, but he still remembered to keep his voice down, so he would not be overheard in the other tents.

"Then there's what can happen to you. There are few of us here and Tagar has many." Lontzen's manner was almost bland, but the eyes that watched the visitor had grown absolutely merciless.

"If he accuses me of giving shelter to a runaway slave, what can I do? I'd be perfectly helpless, wouldn't I? He could drag you back to Gazim, or, if he chose, the things he intends to do to you he could do right here in front of me. I'd have no power to stop it."

Caverly left his chair in one movement. He was no taller than the other white man, but at that moment his lank, lithe body seemed to tower above the other's.

"You degraded, renegade, treacherous——"

In the eloquence of his contempt and wrath, he got so far—that was as far as he ever got.

There came from out of the silvery night an uproar of sound, sudden and terrifying as crashing thunder in the starlit sky. Volleys of musket shots, the thud of big, charging hoofs, voices shrieking wild cries of battle.

"*Inshalla! Ulla-la-een! Ulla-la-een!*"

The Ras Tagar Kreddache had "crossed" his victims by advancing the

hour and changing the time-honored tactics of desert warfare. The dread attack was launched under the high moon.

CHAPTER VI.

TAGAR STRIKES.

LONTZEN had been standing farthest from the doorway, but he was the first out of the tent, clad in striped-silk pajamas. Caverly would never have believed that such a big, heavy body could vacate a place so fast. It made him think of *deba*, the lumbering, scared hyena, smoked out of his hole.

"Stop it!" Lontzen was yelling. "No! No! Please! You're attacking your friends!" In his excitement he forgot his *sabir*, the *lingua d' Afrique*, which the majority of desert tribes comprehend.

But no lone voice could have made itself heard in that frenzy of noises. As easily cry quits with a *harmattan* of flying sand.

The camp was ringed in by the dunes. From every crest and fluted ridge, musketry fire was pouring into the hollow. Pallid flames twinkled around the rim of the bowl like the play of lightning across a summer's sky. Chunks of lead were spattering everywhere, ripping canvas, plunging into baggage heaps, throwing up spurts of sand.

The *duar* was filled and surrounded by pandemonium. As though a pack of fiends had suddenly risen out of the ground, foaming and shrieking with *rabis furor*.

"*Allahu Akbar! Ulla-la-een! Ulla-la-een-la-een!*"

The camels were up. The straining and snapping of *agal* ropes might be heard through the volleys of shots. Big, ungainly shapes were beginning to stampede among the tents.

Hasty, ragged shooting began to flicker and crack here and there from

behind the breastworks of saddles and bales.

"Mercy! Have mercy!"

Some of Lontzen's men were firing and some were begging for quarter. The piteous cries came from panic-stricken men, awakened from frightful dreams to more frightful realities.

"Sidi!" Lontzen had dodged in back of the *zariba* piles, and was yelling louder than any of the others. "Sidi Sassi! Save us!"

Tagar did not believe in throwing away the lives of his own fighters needlessly. His men, dismounted, lay in a sprawling circle behind the sheltering ridges of the dunes. They would make a shambles in the hollow first, then go down in safety to reap what death had left behind.

A blubbering, moaning camel galloped through the biggest tent, just after Caverly had stepped out of it. There was a flapping and a breaking out of pegs. The frightened beast went on across the desert like a schooner before the wind, with a tent for a sail.

The doorway of the adjoining tent was torn apart. An elegant figure in white linen and silver emerged from the parted flaps.

The newcomer was a tall, gracefully slender man, full clothed in fine, beautifully draped stuffs, rich enough for a Bedouin prince.

Caverly saw the olive-tinged face under the jaunty silken *kafiya*, the soft, full lips, languid eyes, and the thin-bridged nose that was Tagar Kreddache's nose in verity. The American saw at a glance that this was the wolf's cub, returned to his own people—Sassi Kreddache.

Lontzen saw the young man also, and came running. "Sidi Sassi! Tell 'em to stop! It's the ras. Tell 'em who we are."

As the sidi brushed past, Lontzen caught a fragrance of perfumed fabrics. Dignified and unruffled, the

prince threw up a small, manicured hand. "*Aselamu alaikun, marhaba!*" he called out. "My father, it is I, the Si——"

A bullet hit him in the center of the forehead.

The expression of his face was smudged out suddenly as a blotter soaks up red ink. His head went down. His body caved with a gentle, silken rustle and settled in the sand.

Lontzen was down over him, pulling at him with pleading hands. "Sidi! No! We've got to have you——"

Even in that moment Caverly could smile his singular, lopsided smile. Off there behind the dunes lay the terrible Tagar, gripping his rifle and directing the fire of his men. Here was lying the young hopeful, whose father had meant him to be a military genius. The jesters of Kismet must be splitting their sides with laughter.

"He's dead!" moaned Lontzen. "Rainy—he's dead!"

Caverly side-stepped as a blundering camel plunged down between the line of tents. Another beast came charging at them, making throaty sobbing sounds, tripping on his snaking halter rope as he tried to run.

"Look out!"

Caverly grabbed Lontzen by an arm and dragged him out of the way just as the big creature blundered and fell in an ungainly confusion of legs and hump and threshing neck.

As the camel struggled up again, Lontzen wrenched his arm free and threw away his rifle. He snatched up the loose end of the *agal*, and buried his hands in the shaggy tufts of the hump. Caverly then witnessed an astonishing feat in gymnastics.

The frightened camel heaved himself up on his feet. Lontzen went with him. It looked as though some one unseen had given the man a flying boost into the air. The pajama-clad legs spread wide apart, then came down

astride the camel's bobbing neck and wrapped themselves in a strangle grip.

At the rear of the camp, the ground opened fanwise in a shallow draw, running out between two sandy slopes. On that side was a wide gap in the ring of fire. There stretched the one avenue of escape, as any one with eyes in his head could see. If a rider could put a camel through that gantlet, a dozen jumps would take him out of the doomed circle and off across the desert.

Lontzen tried desperately to wrench his mount around. A runaway camel, however, is a demon, and a maniac and a derelict, all in one. This fellow was headed for the highest dune, into the thickest of the shooting. Prayers nor curses nor halter ropes could not turn nor detain him.

The stretching neck jerked back and forth, in rhythm with the big-boned, stilty legs that were spread to their utmost. Up they went, camel and rider, Lontzen clutching hair for dear life.

They galloped in flying dust to the top of the slope, straight through the line of ambushed men. For an instant a flitting outline showed against the shining sky, then camel and man bobbed down out of sight on the farther side of the ridge.

CAVERLY in those few seconds had looked on open-mouthed, as though nothing else were quite worth seeing. The suddenness and boldness of the camel's maneuver took the Zouais by surprise, before they could concentrate their fire. Caverly was convinced that the runaways had broken through. By now, they were out of range, running across the open country.

He picked up Lontzen's rifle and fingered the bolt, scanning the crests for a mark. He became aware that somebody was standing behind him and blazing away with a small-caliber gun.

The quick, spiteful little shots cracked almost in his ear. He glanced

over his shoulder, and saw it was Boadecea Treves.

The girl must have been getting ready for bed when Tagar's forces swooped down. She cast aside her helmet and tunic and her shirt was half unbuttoned. One leather puttee was missing, and the opened cuff of the breeches was hanging around her bare ankle. Her thick, tawny hair curled at wild ends above the rumpled line where a comb once had parted it.

She finished the cartridges in the magazine, and ducked a moist forehead across her shirt sleeves. "Did you see that?" she demanded. "Did you see him?"

"Could I have missed him?"

"He charged 'em—right into the thick! I never saw anything so splendid!"

Caverly looked to make sure that she was in earnest. She was. Her elongated, lovely eyes were aflame with a thrilling remembrance. Evidently she hadn't arrived on the scene in time to see Lontzen trying to saw his camel's head in the other direction.

"Gallant, I call it," said Caverly, and let it go at that. Death, unpleasant and certain, awaited Lontzen yonder somewhere, even if the bullets had missed him. Why not grant him his moment of glory?

Caverly thought he saw a turbaned head looking over the nearest ridge. He sighted deliberately, and felt a queer satisfaction in the kick of the rifle stock against his cheek. It had been two years since he held a firearm in his hands.

Whether he hit his man he couldn't say, but the small, looming target was gone.

The men behind the *zariba* piles were defending themselves despairingly. There were not as many of them as there had been. Three or four things like laundry bundles were tumbled in front of the tents.

The patter of bullets around the little inclosure was like splashing raindrops. Caverly saw a sheeted figure spring erect behind one of the camel saddles, double up again and sink down in twitching limpness upon the moon-brightened sand.

Off across the slopes, moving forms were beginning to show themselves. He slammed his rifle bolt into the receiver four times in succession. The fifth time, the firing pin clicked. Two distant figures stayed on the slope as they fell. A third crawled back over the top of the ridge.

The firing from the *zariba* was growing feebler. Somebody was lying beside one of the big water *fanatis*, trying noisily to breathe. Caverly dropped his empty rifle. A prescience won in other embattled corners of the world warned him that Tagar's men were almost ready to rush.

He turned to the girl. "Chuck it!" "What?"

She looked dazed and frightened, yet some splendid instinct kept her standing in the open, carefully shoving fresh cartridges into the magazine slot of her toylike rifle.

"All finished," said Caverly. He caught her elbows and pushed her into the door of Sidi Sassi's tent.

"What is there to do?" she gasped.

"I've thought of something. It may work. It's a chance."

She shook her head. "It's all over. I know that. You don't have to lie to me."

Caverly followed her beneath the canvas, got on his hands and knees and poked his head out under the flap. Sidi Sassi was lying as he had dropped, his boots sticking almost in the doorway. Caverly grabbed the ankles and dragged the unresisting weight into the tent.

He pulled the girl down beside him. "Dig!" he commanded.

Caverly was on all fours, scooping

double handfuls of sand back between his legs. Bo Treves watched him blankly.

"What for?" she asked.

"A hole for three! Two of us alive and one of us dead. Dig!"

Still she did not quite comprehend, but she crouched at his side, nevertheless, and started pawing out sand.

"We not only have to think about tonight, but of to-morrow and next week," Caverly said, digging furiously. "There's no use saving our lives now, to lose them in a few days from sun and thirst. And the sidi, as he is, may be worth much to us later on."

She looked at the quiet, silk-clad figure on the ground, and shivered, as though the night air had turned suddenly cold. "What are we going to do?"

"Didn't you ever dig in the sand at the seashore—when you were little? And bury yourself—all but your face? The difference is that your face goes under, this time."

With his companion's help Caverly scooped out a shallow hole, long enough for a grave, and wide enough for three to lie down side by side.

"Unlike seashore sand, desert sand is as loose and dry three feet down as it is on the surface," he said, deepening the hole. "You can't tell by the look of it that the bottom layers have been disturbed."

THE rattle of shots around the circle of the dunes had dwindled ominously in the last minute or two. The fighting *en tirailleur* was about finished. Without seeing, Caverly knew that the ring of skirmishers was breaking up as individuals began taking to camelback.

The answering fire from the defenders of the *zariba* square had almost ceased. At any time now they could expect the finishing charge of the ferocious desert tribesmen.

Caverly and his companion were

pulling out the sand as fast as they could use their hands. Their pit was at least two feet deep.

"Enough!" he declared at length. "Lie down—on that side."

He pulled off Lontzen's shirt, and ripped it into two parts. The girl stretched out on her back. He folded the soft linen fabric and laid a pad over her face, to protect her nose and mouth and eyes.

"It's porous enough, we'll hope. Don't fight for breath. Take it easy." He dragged sand over her legs and body, and at the last covered her head and face.

"All right?" he asked. "Can you manage?"

"I can try," answered a muffled voice.

Caverly rolled the sidi's body into the pit on the other side. There was no need this time for a filter of linen. He buried the motionless shape, then sat down in the space that was left in the middle of the trench.

First, he covered his feet and legs and thighs. He carefully smoothed over the surface sand. Then he lay flat and pulled the heaped-up sand over his body and chest, as far up as his arm-pits.

His elbows were pressed against his sides, but he kept his hands free. The slip of linen cloth went over his face. Burrowing back with his head and scooping with hands and fingers in the limited space left them, he covered over his shoulders and neck and face. He could feel the fine, dry grains dribbling through his hair and around his ears.

The firing outside had suddenly ceased. An appalling silence shut him in. This was the breathless lull ahead of the tornado.

His head twisted and turned and buried deeper. The sand was funneling in from the outer edges and leveling over the linen cloth. He pulled his hands down. The sliding soil filled in

the place where they had been. A light, sifting weight lay upon his face and forehead. He could not be quite certain, but he hoped he was entirely hidden.

The hush that had lasted almost too long for nerves to bear. It changed in an instant to the din of *Jahannan*. Shots and shrieks and caterwaulings made the blood run chill. The earth, of which Caverly was a part, trembled with the thunder of onrushing hoofs.

CHAPTER VII.

FORTUNE'S TOSS.

IN a few seconds the charging horde swept down and possessed the camp. From his cramped and stifling place of inhumation, Caverly could hear the world above ground turned to fury and madness.

Trampling and pushing and plunging of heavy bodies; the clank and creak of straining saddles and rattle of bare metal; panting and yelling and frightful laughter; shots fired now and then, here and there, not in the hurry and heat of fighting, but wantonly. Tagar's men were mopping up.

Somebody ran over the sand crying out to Allah, and that cry broke in two, like a wailing string suddenly snapped.

Caverly was breathing about once to the minute. Under the cloth and the stifling layer of sand, he could draw down enough air to keep himself alive. He worked his hands along his body and under the loose soil until he touched the fingers of a lax, warm hand beside him.

A faintly reassuring squeeze answered his question. Evidently the girl also was managing to breathe.

They were all right so far. Their next half hour hinged on Lontzen's fate. Tagar's men had seen the tracks of the fugitive slave entering the camp.

When they did not find the slave, living or dead, they probably would

conclude that he was the one who had rushed through their lines on a runaway camel, providing the camel and his rider had broken through!

If not—if Lontzen had been shot down or captured—then the end of the story was written. The Zouais, in that event, could be sure their slave was hidden hereabouts. They would search until they dug him out of his barrow.

Caverly had to lie in half-smothered uncertainty, listening to sounds that no man—and certainly no woman—ever would quite forget.

The shooting stopped at last, the thudding and slashing and screaming.

It was over with now. Boisterous voices cracked jokes that were younger a thousand years ago but no more grim. The laughter of triumphant men, the pressing and shoving of camels, and the creaking of huge knee joints proclaimed that the victors were beginning to gather their loot.

Those of the raiders who had not dismounted were off across the desert, trying to herd back the camels that had broken loose. Caverly at least could give thanks for the lucky chance that had thrown Lontzen onto the back of a fast *hajin*, and not one of the baggage *hamlas*. If Lontzen were in the clear of the open country, there was small likelihood of his being run down to-night.

The men who stayed in the *duar* were counting spoils and packing things up. Some of them started uprooting the tents. The Sidi Sassi's tent came up with the others. Caverly heard the guy ropes twang as the pegs were jerked out of the ground. The sheltering canvas was whisked away. Only an inch layer of sand hid his face from the moonlight.

His fingers closed upon the smaller fingers that lay almost pulseless in his clasp. Now was the moment in which life hovered at the sickening edge.

Somebody idly thrust a lance head into the sand so close that the grating steel all but touched his ear. A moment later the shaft was pulled up and the lancer went on, riding his camel over the sidi's shallow grave. Caverly felt the jar of the sinking hoofs that just missed his face. He shrank inwardly and held his breath. The man buried at his right hugged the soil no more quietly than did Caverly.

The riders who had dashed across the dunes were beginning to return with their captured camels. The sidi's tent had been pitched on a side slope. The camel herders for the greater part held the easier ground of the lower draw.

Each truant camel on arrival was forced to kneel and take on his appointed burden. Caverly could hear the men cinching up the packing *hawias* and lashing the heavy loads over the wooden bows.

"*Adaryaya!* Halt, camels! Down!" And up came the beasts again, moaning and blubbing over all these indignities.

Caverly recognized Tagar's harsh voice giving orders in one direction, and then in another. All the ras' life had been spent making and unmaking camps, and seeing the camel loads stayed where they were put. After the first confusion, matters were moving swiftly.

Unless something unforeseen happened, the raiders soon would be riding away with their booty.

The hand laying in Caverly's hand had grown limp and colder. He pinched the curving fingers, and received a half-hearted response. The girl was still alive. He wondered if he ought to be glad or sorry. Even if they were not discovered now, their troubles were barely beginning.

The camels were freighted and on their feet. Caverly was able to interpret the commands as the lines were

formed. He heard the sudden moving forward, the disciplined *tromp, tromp, tromp* of camels swinging into marching formation.

The raiders were leaving. Caverly's heart was thumping fast. They were going away—voices receding, hoofs trudging across the cushioning sand.

The sounds diminished. Caverly stayed unmoving under the sand, feeling the tremors of the ground growing fainter, listening while the marching rhythm became a distant, dying murmur. At last the hush of the desert stole back once more upon the dunes.

For a long while he waited, even after he was positive that every one was gone. Patience reached an end. Caverly pushed up his nose and removed the smothering rag from his face.

There was only silence and moonlight—the revealing moon and the menacing, treacherous silence.

He sat up, dumping the sand from his body, and then crawled to his feet. His feet and lower legs felt numb and dead. He could stamp them without any sense of feeling. There was no living thing visible in that ghastly amphitheater among the dunes.

"Bo!" he said, and stooped again. He dug down and found a hand and arm. Then he scraped the sand away and pulled the girl from the cramped pit in which she had been laying.

It was better not to look at the scene that Tagar's men had left behind them. This much, at least, she might be spared.

He hauled her to her feet. Before her blinking, half-blind eyes were able again to endure the brilliancy of the moonlight, he faced her toward the higher dunes.

He slid a supporting arm about her waist and led her away to the top of the slope. There she sank down on the bluff of sand, overlooking the calm and peaceful desert.

CHAPTER VIII.

DESPERATE PLANNING.

CAVERLY'S glance swept the line of the horizon. The broad, scuffed trail of many camels was like a dark highroad winding across the rolling ground. The distant *wadi* had swallowed up the marching shapes. There was nothing whatever in sight.

"I'm going below for a while," he said. "You stay here. If you see anything, let me know. I'll come back as soon as I can."

The girl's breathing had grown less spasmodic. "Carl?" It was her first effort of speech.

"Left you in the lurch, my dear!"

The line of her jaw molded in quick resentment. "Please don't say 'my dear' when you talk to me. You're impossible." She gazed to the southwest and spoke under her breath, ignoring Caverly: "He must have been shot or taken."

"You're wrong. He got through. He's out there somewhere this minute, lathering a camel. If he had been killed or caught, we wouldn't be here wondering about him. You can figure it out for yourself."

Caverly turned away and descended reluctantly into the horrid, trampled hollow where Lontzen's *duar* had been. He was absent for more than a quarter of an hour.

When at length he came back to the crest, he bore in his arms a bundle of cloths that caught the pretty shimmer of the moonlight and trailed over his shoulder with a silky fluttering.

Bo Treves barely looked at him as he came up. A faint attar-of-roses fragrance drifted her way. She raised her head with shocked abruptness.

"What—what have you there?"

He dropped the armful of stuff on the sand, and stood sentinellike on the top of the *gherd*, studying the dim, low line of the sky. Off beyond the

shadows of the farther dunes, he discovered a tiny flicker of yellowish light.

"There they are," he said, "going into camp. After their journey to-day I didn't think they'd travel far to-night."

"What did you do down there?" demanded the girl crisply.

Caverly did not appear to hear her. "They'll be squatting around their fires, making a night of it, bragging how good they are. Allah blacken their faces!"

"Those are the Sidi Sassi's clothes!" she declared in a scandalized whisper.

"Peace be with him! May Mouker and Nakèr receive him in forgiveness! *Ash hadu illa Illaha ill Allah!*"

Caverly sat down beside the girl, gazed thoughtfully for an instant at her averted face, then shifted his eyes to measure the depths of the starlit sky.

"Off that direction is the Red Sea and Mecca—fifteen hundred miles!" His tone was gentle and grave, as though he were talking to some one who was young and foolish, yet capable of the fullest understanding. He did not glance at his companion again, but kept on looking at the stars.

"Almost due north," he mused, "are the Kufara oases, where you'd find the tightest confraternity of fanatics in the world. No white people welcome. We'd be abolished long before we got there.

"South," he pursued, "you can see Canopus, which was Mohammed's blue star. If you walked that direction for a hundred days, you could get a drink of water at El Fasher. To the left is Touareg country; off to the right, Ribania, which is worse."

He kicked off Lontzen's shoes and dug his toes in the sand. "*Comprenez vous?*"

"You have said nothing of the west," she told him in a very small voice.

"In that direction are the Tibesti Mountains. I know of a well, fifteen days and nights from here if one were to ride as the Touaregs ride, eating lunch and supper in the saddle. But we haven't a camel or a tin of water or a handful of dates for breakfast."

Her eyes turned to him in stark misery. "What are we going to do?"

"Tagar and his gang will be riding for Gazim to-morrow. It's three days from this place. Either we go to Gazim with Tagar, or else——"

He paused. There was no need to finish.

"But——" The girl stared in horror. "That would mean—it would be worse——"

"Listen, Bo! The Sidi Sassi left home when he was little. Nobody at Gazim would recognize the man grown. He had the scribed ruby ring on him, and the amulet and other gimcracks that would have identified the tribal prince. I've got them here in my pocket, and I've got the sidi's clothes."

The girl merely looked at him, too stunned for speech.

"The slave returns in the sidi's silks!" said Caverly. "A man in a loin cloth and a man in a gorgeous *jebalai* are two different kinds of animal. They may know me, or they may not. We are forced to make the toss. Either I go to Gazim as a prince, or it is finished."

"But, I—what is to become of me?" she faltered.

"There was a low-caste camel boy in your crowd. His garments were too poor even to tempt a Zouais. I have brought them. You'll have to wind on the turban, and be a boy. You are Sidi Sassi Kreddache's slave."

The second installment of this desert serial will appear in the next issue of TOP-NOTCH, on the news stands June 15th.



What Price Justice

By Reg Dinsmore

A COMPLETE NOVEL

CHAPTER I.

OUTLAWRY.

JAMES ELLIOTT saw the shooting. He could have touched the murderer as the man left his victim crumpled on the spotless tile floor of the theater foyer and fled past Elliott to the street. For one horror-filled instant Elliott had looked straight into the gunman's face.

A hundred people had been standing near the unfortunate victim. Officers who came had taken the names of many of these people—Elliott's among them.

At home, out of hearing of the children, Elliott recounted the shocking incident to his wife. She looked vaguely worried. He told about it again at the lodge meeting that evening.

"Huh! Forget it, Jim!" his friends

warned him solemnly. "It isn't exactly safe to see those things nowadays. You don't know what may be behind it. I wouldn't talk about it too much if I were you."

"I'm not worrying," Elliott told them. "Mighty little chance of me being called as a witness, I guess. Why, there must have been a hundred people there. The State won't need the testimony of all of us, that's a cinch!"

Next morning Elliott was slightly surprised to receive a summons to appear at the hearing. His wife was frightened.

"You'll testify, Jim?" she asked anxiously.

"Sure—if I'm called upon! Can't lie out of a thing like that, Ruth. What would become of this country if every one refused testimony?

"But, shucks, I'm not worrying! I

won't be picked for a witness. There must have been twenty people out of that bunch who saw the thing as plainly as I. There'll be plenty of witnesses without me."

Almost hysterically his wife caught at his coat lapels. She looked up at him from affectionate eyes which threatened tears.

"Jim, I'm proud of you! Of course I know you'll tell the truth. But"—and she inclined her golden head toward the breakfast room where their three small children were laughing over their morning meal—"what would I do if anything should happen to you?"

For an instant Elliott felt helpless, weak. Then his inordinate sense of right surged back within him. He kissed his wife.

"Nothing will happen, Ruth," he told her gravely, and went off to the hearing.

The seriousness of his wife's question, the solemn warnings of his friends, had set Elliott to thinking. For the first time he experienced a feeling of vague uneasiness about the matter.

All the way downtown he walked well out toward the curb, avoiding shadowy doorways and the entrances of alleys. It was not a pleasant sensation, this momentary expectation of a bullet in the back.

Strangely enough out of the score-and-odd witnesses summoned, Elliott and two others were the only ones who actually admitted seeing the shooting. One of these witnesses Elliott knew in a business way. The man was a well-to-do proprietor of a garage in an outlying suburb.

Elliott answered the questions of interrogating officers in a straightforward manner. He evaded none of them. Later, when a dozen suspects, which the police dragnet had scooped up, were led before him, he recognized and identified the murderer among them. The two other witnesses identified the same man.

After the hearing, as Elliott was

about to leave, the police commissioner introduced to him one Officer Daureghy, a stubborn-shouldered, plain-clothes man.

"Officer Daureghy will be near you most of the time from now until after the trial," the commissioner told Elliott.

Elliott smiled rather wanly. "Is it as bad as that, commissioner?" he asked anxiously.

"We suspect," the commissioner told him gravely, "that the criminal you identified is a member of one of the toughest gangs in the city. The State can't afford to take chances on a witness like you, Elliott.

"Now don't become panicky. Just go about your everyday business as usual. But keep off the street as much as possible—don't take needless chances. We'll keep an eye on you and give you every possible protection. Good luck!"

Very thoughtfully, very soberly, Elliott walked home, the plain-clothes man following at a respectful distance.

Two mornings later the newspapers carried scare headings. One of the State's witnesses in the now-famous case—the garage proprietor—had been murdered. His car had been bombed as he rode from home to his place of business. No one had seen the bomb thrown. It was thought probable that it had been concealed in the car and set to go with a time fuse.

Followed sleepless nights and uneasy days for the Elliott family. Now, instead of a single officer loitering before the Elliott home, there were two of them. Wherever James Elliott went he was preceded by one and followed by the other.

A week later the State's other witness was shot from a passing car as he was ascending the steps of his church.

Before the extra that announced this startling outrage was on the street, a closed car slid to a stop before the Elliott home. A man got out, spoke with

the officers before the house and ran up the walk to the door.

Elliott himself answered the bell. It was the police commissioner.

"Sorry, Mr. Elliott," said the commissioner, "but those gangsters have just got the State's other witness. You're the only leg we've got left to stand on. Judge Winslow deems it advisable that you be given better protection. Pack a bag and come with me to the judge's home. He has a plan—and a good one, I think."

"My family——" Elliott demurred.

"—will be much safer with you away!" cut in the commissioner. "It's you who are a menace to these gangsters, not your family! Look at the thing in a reasonable light, Elliott."

"Maybe you're right," admitted Elliott, and went.

JUDGE WINSLOW was a brusque but kindly man. He eyed Elliott sharply, held out a hand in greeting, and at once became very human.

"I admire a man who sticks by his guns, Elliott. I don't think any more of this scheme of running away to hide than you do. Nevertheless, we've got to admit that, in spite of our best police protection, the testimony of two of the State's witnesses has been destroyed, the witnesses murdered. You, Mr. Elliott, are now the star witness for the State. The only man whose word can convict this murderer.

"We feel convinced that it was one of 'Tarantula' Goan's gunmen who did that shooting the other afternoon. The murder of the two witnesses strengthens our belief. Goan is a power in the underworld, a ruthless, cruel power.

"As yet we have been unable to fasten a major crime upon him. The conviction of this murderer may drive a wedge that will break up the gang and bring Goan to the justice he so richly deserves.

"Goan realizes this as keenly as any

one and will leave no stone unturned to help his henchman. I do not wish to alarm you, Elliott, but Goan will silence you if he can find a way to do it.

"Considering your value to the State as a witness, considering your family, considering everything, I know you will be a willing party to any plan that seems best for your protection. Am I not right?"

"I'm pretty frightened," admitted Elliott, soberly. "I've got too much to live for to kick out just now."

"Yet you'll testify?" asked Judge Winslow, kindly.

"Yes, sir!—if I live to get to the witness stand!"

"Good!" exulted the judge. "We'd make short shrift of the gangsters of this country if there were more citizens like you! Now to business!

"To begin with, Mr. Elliott, do you know anything about life in the big woods?"

"Mighty little," admitted Elliott. "Just what I've read, that's all."

"Are you willing to let us spirit you out of the city and go into the forest with a guide of my own choosing—one Herb Hood, who has guided me on several hunting and fishing excursions and is as fine a woodsman as ever swung a paddle—to remain in his care for approximately a month, or until court convenes?"

Elliott pondered for a moment. "If you think it necessary, judge," he agreed.

"I most certainly do! All right, then, here's the plan," and Judge Winslow outlined for Elliott a plan that sounded like a page from a J. Fennimore Cooper novel.

MEANTIME, in the basement of Judge Winslow's home, a rat-faced janitor crouched in a shadowy corner with a telephone receiver glued to his smudgy ear.

At the other end of the wire a small

microphone, cleverly concealed in the scrollwork of a chandelier, not six feet above the judge's head, transmitted to the janitor, Judge Winslow's every word.

The man listened until the conversation had ended. Carefully replacing the receiver behind a false brick in the wall, he slipped out the basement door to the street.

As he shuffled away, he grinned crookedly to himself. "De Tarantula," he chuckled, "is gonna hand me a nize piece of coin fer dis info'!"

CHAPTER II.

SUSPICIONS.

THE kerosene reflector lamp above the door of the little station at Cloud River lighted dimly a twenty-foot circle of the platform beneath it. In the murk beyond its yellow glow a few almost indistinguishable forms moved aimlessly about.

In the darkness, down at the far end of the station platform, stood a solitary figure, apparently listening to the distant rumble of the approaching train.

Three men, who had been loitering in the shadows and covertly watching this lone figure, moved slowly down the platform. As they walked, one of them pulled a blackjack from his pocket and slipped the thong of the heavy weapon about his wrist.

Talking nonchalantly, the three strolled within reach of the solitary man. There was a lightninglike swing. A sickening *thut*.

The lone watcher crumpled like a neck-shot deer and would have fallen had not two of the men caught him and supported him between them. The third man walked directly behind to cover the unconscious man's dragging legs from the chance view of any one up the platform.

Just before the train swept around the last curve and flooded the station and

its surroundings with the white radiance of its headlight, the men crossed the track with their victim and were swallowed up by the dark wall of the forest.

Amid the grinding scream of brakes, and flying pennants of white steam, the train slowed to a stop. Three or four lumberjacks, their duffel bags on their shoulders, clambered noisily down from the smoking car.

Then, from the steps of one of the day coaches, a man descended to the platform. He was a small man. His clothing was the everyday dress of the business man. He carried but one piece of luggage, a small bag.

As he walked into the circle of light from the reflector lamp there was about him an uncertainty that he seemed to be trying hard to conceal. He glanced nervously about him. Apparently he was looking for some one.

A tall figure hurried from the darkness and approached the little man—a man who wore the broad-brimmed hat, mackinaw and moccasins of a woodsman.

"Is this Mr. Elliott?" the newcomer inquired.

"Yes. Are you Mr. Hood?"

"Yer betyah!"

Elliott breathed a deep sigh of relief, shook hands with the big man, and at once became voluble.

"Hood, you've no idea how relieved I am! I had no way of knowing whether you'd received Judge Winslow's wire or not. What I'd done if no one had met me in this place, I don't know."

"Sure, got the judge's wire O. K. Everything's all set."

"Then we leave for the woods in the morning, what?"

"No. To-night."

Elliott looked his surprise. He cast an uneasy glance at the starless sky, another at his city clothes.

"To-night, Hood? Why, I wasn't expecting that. I'm not prepared. I can't go into the woods in this rig!"

The big man laughed reassuringly. "That's all fixed, Mr. Elliott. Since you left the city Judge Winslow has wired me again. He said there was no time to be lost, that we must get away from Cloud River as soon as possible.

"He told me that you were coming unprepared and directed me to arrange everything. There's all the clothing you will need in the packs. The packs are in the canoe down there on the river bank.

"I know that river like I do the palm of my hand. If we start now we can be twenty miles from here by morning. And"—lowering his voice suggestively—"twenty miles ought to mean a lot to you right now!"

Elliott glanced nervously behind him. "Have I been followed here?" he whispered.

"Who knows, Mr. Elliott? I've told you what the judge said in his telegram. Let's get going!"

Elliott glanced at two square-jawed, heavy-shouldered men who had followed him from the train and were now walking up and down beside the cars—plain-clothes men who had been detailed to accompany him to Cloud River. Should he tell them of this new development before leaving them?

The officers saw Elliott looking at them. They tossed their hands in farewell.

Elliott returned their salutation and turned to his guide. "If I have been followed, those boys will attend to the matter. They're right on the job, you see."

The big man took Elliott's grip and faced away into the darkness. "I see," he said.

Elliott wondered if there was a tinge of sarcasm in those two words.

ELLIOTT'S guide did not lead him through the little settlement behind the station. Instead he followed a narrow trail that paralleled the railroad

tracks for a little distance, then swung sharply down a steep bank, and stopped.

Although he could see but little, Elliott knew that he stood upon the bank of a river. He could hear the slithering whisper of the current as it passed in the darkness. Across the dull smudge of silver, which was the stream, he made out the black wall of the forest on its opposite bank.

A distant owl hooted mournfully. From somewhere high above him in the murk of the night came down the garbled cry of migrating geese. It was all very strange and a bit uncanny to the man from the city.

James Elliott shivered as the chill of the night crept through his thin clothing. He inwardly cursed the strange twist of fate that had so ruthlessly dragged him from a comfortable home and sent him on this strange pilgrimage.

In guarded tones Elliott's guide spoke:

"All set, bozos?"

His answer, to Elliott's surprise, was the sudden flare of an electric torch. The white beam of the light played for a moment over a canoe. In it were two men. Between the men, in the bottom of the craft, was piled a quantity of camp duffel.

The light beam switched—to reveal another canoe which, Elliott could now make out, the holder of the flash light was steadying in the shallows.

Elliott's guide stepped to this craft and took his place in its bow. "All right, Mr. Elliott," he directed, "get right in and set with your back against that middle thwart. Better pull some of those blankets around you. It'll be cold before morning."

Elliott demurred. "I—I thought—" he ventured. "Judge Winslow gave me to understand that we were to go alone, Hood. Just you and I, I mean."

"New plans, Mr. Elliott. New plans! As I told you a few moments ago, I got another wire from the judge since

you left the city. Please get into the canoe. Every minute counts."

Somewhat reluctantly, and with a vague uneasiness growing within him, Elliott awkwardly settled himself in the canoe. The blur of the bank drew away. He felt the drag of the current as it caught the craft. The damp night breath of the stream rushed up against his face. They were off.

For a time Elliott lay back against the thwart, absorbed by the novelty of his surroundings. He watched the backward glide of the shadowy, forested banks. He listened to the *schlis-s-sh-schlis-s-sh* of the regularly spaced paddle strokes.

The tremor and life of the bouyant craft thrilled him strangely. It was like riding through black space on the back of some smoothly flying, huge bird.

After a time he endeavored to engage his guide in the bow in conversation. The man's answers were civil enough but short. Elliott concluded that the man's paddling demanded his entire attention, and so did not bother him by further questions.

Then Elliott began to study the skillful sway and thrust of the shoulders of the man he was facing—the stern man of his canoe.

Elliott could not see much of the paddler, but it seemed to him that here was the man whose skill it was that was responsible for the expert handling of the canoe, not Hood, up there in the bow.

By the glowing terms in which Judge Winslow had set forth Herb Hood's ability as a canoe man, the guide should certainly be back there at the stern paddle. Elliott was somewhat surprised that he was not.

But they had negotiated miles of dark river, had passed through several stretches of swift water where the canoe had leaped and plunged and wallowed, and there had been no accident.

No, there was no question as to the ability of this stern man. Elliott fumbled in his pocket for his pipe, crammed a load of fine cut into it, smoked for a while, then slept.

THE next he knew they were gliding through the dense, gray mist of dawn. The blankets about him were wet with it. High above, spectral in the ever-changing mist wraiths, he glimpsed the tips of towering spruces on the river bank. The river seemed wider. Perhaps it had been augmented by other streams they had passed in the night.

The paddles were swinging with the same pendulumlike regularity as when Elliott had dropped asleep. Could it be that these men had kept up the steady grind the whole night through? He looked about him at his traveling companions.

The stern man of the canoe in which he was riding was all that Elliott had pictured him from the uncertain glimpses he had of the paddler the night before. Undoubtedly the man had passed the fifty mark. Yet by his vigorous paddle strokes, the keenness of his dark eyes, a certain wiry toughness that he seemed to possess, he could easily have passed for a man in his late thirties.

A flowing beard of raven-wing black swept nearly to his ornately carved belt. He was perfectly aware that Elliott had awakened and was watching him, and he returned the city man's appraising glance with level-eyed steadiness.

Elliott twisted in his blankets to look at the second canoe, which was only a few feet away.

In its bow paddled a small man so dark of skin that at first Elliott thought him an Indian. At second glance, however, he decided that the man was probably a French-Canadian, with perhaps a strong dash of Indian blood in his veins.

At the stern paddle of the canoe la-

bored a young giant. The man had pulled off his shirt for more ease in paddling. The garment lay upon the pile of camp duffel before him. Elliott noticed the accumulation of mist upon it. Evidently this man had paddled stark naked above the belt throughout the long cold night.

"What a torso the fellow has!" thought Elliott as he watched the slip and writhe of pliant muscles beneath the man's sun-browned skin. "He should be some sculptor's model."

His glance traveled to the beautifully proportioned neck that rose from between broad shoulders, climbed to the paddler's face, and remained riveted there in horrified astonishment.

It was not a face one would expect to find above such a faultless body. Some terrible injury had blended the man's features into one shocking scar.

Part of the nose was missing. One eye socket glared red and empty. The flesh of one cheek had been burned or torn away, the bones being covered only by tight-drawn, parchmentlike skin.

Long, straight hair, the color of dead grass, hung in disarray against the scarred cheek, worn purposely that way, perhaps, to cover the disfigurement.

With a shudder, Elliott turned his eyes away—to meet squarely those of the stern man of his canoe.

Evidently the man had been watching Elliott. Now he was smiling slightly at the city man's surprise and horror.

Elliott opened his lips to voice a question. The bearded stern man placed a warning finger to his lips. He slackened his stroke, allowed his canoe to fall behind that of the scarred paddler, then he bent forward and whispered:

"He's mighty sensitive about his looks, mister. If ye know what's good for ye, ye won't mention the matter in his hearing!"

"What happened?" whispered Elliott. "War?"

"'Smoke' Driscoll's been my pardner

for nigh three year' now, and I don't know yet."

Again Elliott's canoe took the lead.

For another twenty minutes they paddled on through the mists. The gray obscurity thickened. At a distance of fifty feet the other canoe was hardly discernible. Then the big man in the bow of Elliott's canoe ceased paddling and addressed the stern man.

"Better land, Cutts, don't you think? I'm ready for chow and I expect every one feels about the same. Swing in to the bank when you find a good place."

"Uh-huh," grunted the stern man.

"Good morning, Hood!" said Elliott. "That's a fine suggestion you just made. I could eat a rubber boot right now!"

"Oh, hello, Mr. Elliott!" The big man twisted his head to grin down at the city man behind him. "How'd you get through the night?"

"Fine, Hood! Slept the sleep of the innocent, thanks."

"That's a compliment to your guides, Mr. Elliott. You must have unlimited confidence in them," laughed the big man.

"Why shouldn't I?" inquired Elliott. "Judge Winslow gave me to understand that you were the most proficient guide in the State."

Elliott happened to be looking straight at Cutts as he spoke. He thought he saw the flicker of a sarcastic smile at the corners of the man's bearded lips. He wondered why. Perhaps Cutts was jealous of Herb Hood's enviable reputation.

CHAPTER III.

THE WRAITH.

THE canoes swung closer to the bank.

For another five minutes they cruised slowly along looking for a suitable landing place.

Elliott, the only man in the two canoes who was facing backward, was idly watching the shifting mist wraiths that hugged close to the water astern.

Suddenly, like a fade-in on a cinema screen, something tangible took shape back there in the mist. For just an instant Elliott saw it, then the fog curtain shifted again and it was gone.

In that surprising instant Elliott had seen a man in a canoe. A bronze-faced, bare-headed man who had raised a hand in greeting, then laid that hand in an unmistakable gesture for silence across his lips.

Elliott's heart leaped furiously. They had been followed. Was this one of Tarantula Goan's hired murderers lurking on their trail?

But no, this man he had seen did not bear the earmarks of a criminal. That frank, sun-browned face, that open-palmed gesture of greeting did not smack of treachery.

Elliott's lips, that had parted to hiss a warning to his paddlers, closed soundlessly. Thoughtfully, he clambered up the bank when the landing was made.

For some reason that he could not have explained himself, Elliott put off speaking to his companions about the strange man in the canoe. The longer he procrastinated, the firmer became his determination to remain silent on the subject.

Perhaps it was the innate love of adventure that is rooted deep in every man that was the cause of this.

James Elliott had always led a quiet life. Adventure had passed him by. But like thousands of other men whose lives run in humdrum channels he had dreamed dreams.

Circumstance had thrust adventure upon him. Very likely it would never come again. Then why deaden the poignant tang of it by bleating out his fears and a plea for protection to his companions?

Elliott had seen but one man in the canoe. He, with his paddlers, was five. Even though the strange man was an agent of the dreaded Tarantula Goan, the odds were all in Elliott's favor.

Here was a bit of forest drama taking shape—the thing for which one paid money at the news stands and picture theaters.

Only this was the genuine article; forested hills and rushing rivers for a background, the tang of wood smoke and fir balsam sharp in one's nostrils. Was he a man or a puppet, Elliott asked himself?

Was he to keep his own council in regard to the lone paddler and become a character, an actor, in this interesting drama, or was he to whine for help and remain a cringing outsider? He was no weakling! He'd play the game!

The decision went to Elliott's head like a draft of potent liquor. He found himself standing in the wings of a virtual stage, waiting for the curtain to rise. Thrilling with a pleasant excitement, he awaited his cue.

[T was the bearded Cutts, not Hood, who gave orders this morning, Elliott was surprised to note. Under his gruff directions the canoes were hidden, a day's provisions were taken from the packs, and a march back into the timber began. Not until they were a mile from the river was camp made.

Elliott understood the reason for this when Cutts cautioned Levacue, the French-Canadian canoemate of the scar-faced Smoke, about the wood he was cutting for the camp fire.

"Dry hardwood, Levacue. Tinder dry! We don't want no smoke showin' on this cruise!"

After a breakfast of bacon, canned beans, and scalding black coffee, the men made themselves comfortable by the fire, sucked drowsily at their pipes for a few moments. Then, all but Cutts went to sleep.

To Elliott it looked as if they were camped for the day. He asked Cutts about it.

"No more travelin' till dark," Cutts told him. "Might meet some one on

the river. Just as well if nobody sees us."

"I should think you'd need sleep as well as the rest of the men," ventured Elliott. "Why don't you get it while you have the chance? I slept nearly all night, not a bit tired. I'll watch camp and keep the fire going."

"Don't ye worry none about my sleepin'," growled Cutts. "I kin sleep when there's nothing else to do. I've got to cut some settin' poles anyhow, got considerable swift water to climb later on."

"Watch camp, kin ye? Well, yer'd better watch it—clost! We ain't got no time to waste looking for a lost tenderfoot!"

Buttoning his flowing beard inside the leather jerkin that he wore, and picking up ax and rifle, Cutts walked away to look for canoe poles.

Elliott did not particularly like the tone of voice Cutts had used. He wondered what he had done to antagonize the man. Perhaps the woodsman was a crab by nature.

It was said that solitary life in the forest sometimes warped a man's disposition, and Cutts, without a shadow of doubt, was a dyed-in-the-wool forest dweller.

Elliott filled his pipe, lighted it with a burning sliver from the camp fire, and looked about the little glade in which the camp was made. It promised to be a long, uninteresting day with three of the men asleep and only the surly Cutts to talk to.

Across the fire from him the three men slept, the Frenchman audibly; Smoke, the scar face, half reclining against a rock, his rifle close beside him. The man's form, even in the relaxation of slumber, hinted of pantherine strength.

With his eyes closed, his disfigured features were still more horrible than ever. Smoke Driscoll was not old. Elliott guessed the man to be thirty.

The big guide who had met Elliott at the station slept on his back, his hands locked beneath his head. As Elliott gazed contemplatively down upon him the same uneasiness surged up within him that he had experienced the night before.

There was something about the man that did not ring true. To be sure the general appearance of the man tallied closely with Judge Winslow's description of Herb Hood, yet there were things that caused Elliott to wonder.

The man was tanned but not weather-bronzed like these other men. Beneath his belt there was the hint of a paunch. Elliott had noticed as they came in from the river that he carried no rifle. Now, through the open front of the man's flannel shirt, he glimpsed a slim strap that crossed the chest.

This could mean but one thing—that he wore a gun in a shoulder holster. Why should a woodsman be wearing a gun beneath his shirt and carrying no rifle?

The city man shrugged and turned away. He was ashamed of himself. Panicky! Bah—a regular old woman! He'd find something to take up his thoughts.

On the far side of the glade a peculiar fungus on the side of a tree trunk caught his attention. He walked across to examine it.

AS Elliott stood, back to the forest, his attention focused on the strange-shaped knurl, a hand slipped noiselessly over his shoulder, a broad palm clamped tight across his mouth. He was pulled backward against a wide chest.

"Sh-h-h-h!" a voice hissed warningly in his ear.

Elliott thought it was Cutts. He twisted his head around and looked up into the face of—the lone paddler of the morning mists.

The surprise, uncertainty, yes, fear of the moment, was too much for El-

liott. He wriggled convulsively, twisted his mouth from under that smothering hand, and yelled.

That frightened yell was a signal for a series of events of breath-taking rapidity. He was snatched up off the ground as if he had been a side of mutton, and thrown across a broad shoulder. The man who carried him leaped toward the shelter of the forest. Elliott struggled. His efforts were futile, did not even slacken his captor's gait.

Back by the camp fire men were yelling at each other as they scrambled to their feet. Glancing back, Elliott saw Levacue throw his rifle to his shoulder, saw violent flame wink at its muzzle.

Something jerked swiftly at the collar of his shirt and splattered against a tree trunk somewhere ahead. Elliott realized that death had missed him by only a fingerbreadth.

The big man by the fire had by now dragged a heavy automatic from his shoulder holster and was filling the underbrush about Elliott's captor with whistling lead.

The rifle of the scar-faced Smoke Driscoll had jammed with his first shot. He was jerking industriously at its lever and swearing a streak.

By now Elliott's captor had managed to reach the shelter of the thick spruces. Back in the glade the firing had stopped, but the yells were more vociferous than ever.

The man who carried Elliott laughed—a good-natured, deep-throated chuckle. Elliott wondered where he found humor in the situation.

Without pausing in his run, Elliott's captor dropped him from his shoulder, clinched a big hand into the back of his coat and shoved him along before him.

All this handling of Elliott, the big man had done with one hand. During the whole scrimmage his other hand had never lost its grip upon the trail-worn rifle that he carried.

Elliott twisted his head and looked at

his captor. The man returned his frightened stare with a cheerful grin.

"Who—who—are—you?" panted Elliott, each word punctuated by the jolt of a forced stride.

"Me? I'm Hood—Herb Hood. Who'd yer think I was, Mr. Elliott, a woodland fairy?"

"I don't—believe you!" cried Elliott. "You're one of Tarantula Goan's men. If you—dare injure me, my friends back there will hunt you down! You'll be shot like a wolf!"

Again the big man chuckled.

"They'll have ter get down inter their hind sights a leetle mite closer before they perforate me very bad, I guess. Now we've got ter get out o' here an' get danged fast. Are yer goin' along with me peaceable, or have I got ter drag yer, Mr. Elliott?"

Elliott's surprise and fear were wearing away. Anger was taking their place. Even though a man is small of stature, his vanity suffers when he is picked up and carried off like a child, notwithstanding the fact that his assailant may be as large as a moose and as strong.

"I see no reason why I should go willingly," said Elliott, and dug his heels into the ground.

His captor wasted no more words, but put his every effort into the task at hand. Elliott found himself flying along through the buck brush and ground hemlock at a pace he had never run before. The thrust of that big hand between his shoulders was as irresistible as the shove of a locomotive.

He was forced up the slope of a ridge and down the other side. Here, hidden in a slight valley, his captor made a right-angle turn, ran another fifty yards, yanked Elliott in behind the sheltering trunk of a mighty spruce, and again clapped that big hand across his mouth.

Elliott looked back to see his erstwhile companions plunge past, reloading their weapons as they ran.

As soon as the three men had passed from sight, Elliott was again hurried on—straight back across the glade where the camp fire burned and into the gloom of the heavy growth beyond. A quarter of a mile was put behind them, then a halt was made.

CHAPTER IV.

Sput! Crack!

THERE!" said the man who claimed to be Herb Hood. "We've dodged them critters fer a while! Now, before this misunderstandin' gets too complicatedlike, lemme satisfy yer as ter who I am. Take a squint at that, Mr. Elliott," and he held toward Elliott a yellow slip of paper that he had pulled from a shirt pocket.

Elliott glanced at the paper. It was a telegram. It read:

HERBERT HOOD,

Spruceville, Maine.

Your man will arrive Cloud River station evening train, November 2nd.

WINSLOW.

Somewhat breathless with excitement and fatigue, Elliott leaned wearily against a tree trunk. He glanced mistrustfully at the man before him. How was he to know but what this telegram was a ruse. Who was he to believe? Again he read the message.

Sput! Crack!

In the yellow bit of paper in Elliott's hands a ragged hole had somehow appeared. The whiplike report of a high-powered rifle reverberated in the timber.

With incredible swiftiness the big man kicked Elliott's feet from under him, dropping to the ground himself as he did so.

As Elliott felt another bullet speared viciously the tree trunk against which he had been leaning. Again the ringing report of the rifle off somewhere in the timber.

"That would be Cutts. Hug th'

ground, Mr. Elliott. That goat can shoot!" cautioned Elliott's captor in a whisper.

Elliott realized fully that the big man had saved his life. He kept low as directed, crawled into a depression behind a root, and turned on his side to watch the man.

The devil-may-care expression of the big man's face was entirely missing now. As he crawled slowly into the shelter of a low boulder, his blazing eyes were darting here and there, searching the distant shadows for the concealed sniper.

Even as he crawled, his rifle was pushed well ahead of him, its hammer laid back like the flattened ear of an angry lynx, ready to belch death at the slightest flicker of motion off there in the timber.

"Hot-damn," thought Elliott to himself, "I'd hate to be Cutts if this bird gets his eye on him!"

For five long minutes Elliott and his kidnaper lay there, straining eyes and ears in a vain effort to locate the hidden rifleman. Then, to their ears, faint but unmistakable, came the sound of running feet. The other men, hearing the shots, were returning.

He who claimed to be Herb Hood turned his face toward Elliott.

"Them other yarhoos are comin', runnin', Mr. Elliott," he whispered. "It's gonna be mighty unhealthy here soon. If that telegram, an' them two bullets which was meant fer your hide, has convinced yer that maybe I'm a safe chaperon, le's we be on our way out o' here. How about it?"

Elliott had the grace to flush. "How was I to know, Hood? Even yet I don't understand—but I'll go. I'll put my trust in you."

Hood wiggled forward, reached out a hand. They shook.

"Good!" smiled the guide. "That fixes it so we can give them critters a run fer their money. Course yer don't

figger th' deal a-tall, Mr. Elliott. When I get time I'll explain th' mix-up.

"Dodge like a scairt rabbit now when yer jump up ter run. If that Cutts feller's goin' ter throw down on us again, le's we try an' make him heave his lead where we ain't. Keep me in sight. Le's go!"

Strangely, the rifle of Cutts was silent. They made their get-away with surprising ease.

BY a circuitous route they headed back toward the river. Ahead, Hood moved through the forest with a loose-hipped, distance-eating gait that Elliott was hard pressed to follow.

The city man burned to question the guide, but he had no time and little breath to devote to conversation. At times Hood had to wait for him to negotiate the tangle of a blow down or some steep stretch of uphill traveling. Always the guide had an encouraging grin or a cheering word.

A greater part of the distance to the river had been covered when Elliott saw the guide pause in his stride and stoop to examine something on the ground. When he came up with Hood it was to find him studying a track in the soft soil of a swampy spot—the track of a man.

There was a troubled look in the guide's blue eyes. He glanced up at Elliott.

"Which of them birds wore lumberman's rubbers instead of moccasins, Mr. Elliott?" he asked.

"Why—why, Cutts, I think. Why do you ask?"

"M-m-m-m. He's a smooth gent—that whisker-totin' Cutts! While we was waitin' fer him ter show himself so we could discourage his lead squirtin', he sneaked away, circled us, an' hotfooted it fer th' river.

"Don't like that a-tall! May mean danged serious trouble fer us. Can yer speed up considerable, Mr. Elliott?"

"Step on it, Hood! I'll follow till the ground flies up and bumps me for a loop," panted Elliott.

Hood shot him an appraising glance, grinned appreciatively, turned away and fell into a swift trot. Elliott stumbled after him.

The last quarter of a mile to the river was torture for James Elliott. Not since his prep-school days had he run as far. A hundred yards through the rocks and brush and his lungs were bursting. Perspiration streamed down into his eyes, blinding him.

Time and again he fell. When he went down he still kept on going on hands and knees until he could regain his feet. It would never do to let Hood out of his sight. Should that happen Elliott knew he could not go any distance without becoming confused, lost.

And now Hood was running. Without a backward glance, seemingly unmindful of Elliott's welfare, the big guide was leaping logs and plunging through thickets with the long bounds of a frightened buck.

Another fifty yards and, to Elliott's surprise, he found himself running easier. His lungs burned less. His feet were not so leaden. He tripped little and fell not at all.

He realized that the strange phenomenon known in marathon circles as "second wind" had come to him. He actually exulted in the knowledge that, after years of inactive life, his body could adapt itself to excessive exertion such as this.

Down the final slope to the river they plunged. Hood slowed his pace as they approached the spot where Elliott's companions of the night had hidden their canoes.

The canoes were there as they had been left, but, to Elliott's surprise, huge holes gaped in the bottoms of each craft. Evidently heavy rocks had been hurled through them. The camp duffel that

had been left beneath the canoes was missing.

Hood did not pause. He kept on toward the river, veering his course downstream a bit. Elliott followed.

Two hundred yards below they came out to the bank of the river. Hood was ahead. Elliott saw the guide's rifle leap up. He glanced past his shoulder just in time to see the stern of a gray canoe slip from sight around a bend in the stream.

"Ten seconds late!" lamented the guide, dropping the butt of his rifle to the ground. "Jest ten little measly seconds! When I smashed Cutts' canoes this mornin' I figgered I'd cramped his style considerable. Now th' slippery devil's beat me at my own game!"

"You don't mean he's——" began Elliott.

"Yes, sir! That's just what I mean—he's stole' my canoe! Yer see, I thought I'd be back here to th' river ahead of any of 'em birds, so I didn't hide my canoe as good as I should. Fer th' same reason I didn't raid Cutts' packs fer supplies. But I did know enough, b'ginger, to hide my pack. Le's we go see if he found that too. If he did, we sure are bushed!"

They found the pack where Hood had hidden it.

"Good!" exulted the guide. "That gives us an ax, blankets, salt, matches, and ammunition fer ol' meat-in-the-pot here," patting his rifle affectionately.

"But I'll tell yer now, Mr. Elliott, there's mighty little grub in that pack though! When I found out that Cutts an' his gang had nabbed yer last night, I didn't stop to stock up. Jest grabbed a canoe an' follered. Didn't want ter get too fur behind th' procession."

"What," asked Elliott, "will we eat?"

"Oh, we'll manage ter live offn th' country fer a while all right. We'll make out somehow till our supplies come in," Hood assured him.

"Supplies come in—what do you

mean? Who is to bring us supplies, and how? Who is Cutts, Smoke Driscoll, and the big man who told me that he was you? How did it happen they met me at Cloud River Station instead of yourself?

"Great Scott, Hood, ever since that shooting, which I was unlucky enough to witness, I've been shoved around like a pawn on a chessboard. Now I'm going to know where I stand or I'm going to be a mighty hard man to get along with!" declared Elliott, heatedly.

Hood favored the city man with a tolerant grin.

"Don't blame yer a mite, Mr. Elliott. But le's we be travelin' while I tell yer as much as I know of th' deal. Smoke Driscoll an' them other ginks are gonna be boilin' down over th' ridge there, as soon as they straighten out our tracks back at camp."

CHAPTER V.

DANGED FUNNY!

THEY left the river and climbed up through the mixed growth of a hardwood slope. As they hurried along, Hood explained to Elliott the strange happenings of the night before.

"I don't believe it's any fault of Judge Winslow's that things broke as they did, Mr. Elliott. Judge tried to play it safe enough. He even sent a man to Spruceville to tell me about you and what he wanted me to do.

"The only other word that ever came to me about the plans was th' telegram I showed yuh. Th' judge would never sent that wire neither, but it was th' only way for him to let me know th' exact time you'd reach Cloud River.

"Waal, it's a cinch that somehow Tarantula Goan got wise to th' game. He had time ter plant a nice little reception committee fer yer at Cloud River.

"I was there, too—waitin' fer yer, all unsuspecting an' serene. Th' train was jest pullin' in. Then somebody

socked me—with a sledge hammer, I guess. If yer doubt it, take a look at that ostrich egg." The guide paused to bend his head and show Elliott a puffy swelling behind one ear.

"Next I knew was when I woke up in th' woods down below th' station. I was danged sick an' wabbly. Got back to th' station somehow.

"Found out from th' station agent, who was workin' late on his books, that th' train had been gone an hour. You was nowhere around. Wow, I was some hot under th' collar!

"Waal, th' station agent remembered seein' a man get off th' train. An', too, he remembered seein' a big feller in a broad-brimmed hat meet that man, and go off into th' night with him.

"He knew th' gent in th' big hat. It was Walmrac, a slippery sort of a guy who th' border customs officials have been watchin' for a year or more.

"Soon's I hear that Walmrac met yer, I figgered that probably Bill Cutts was mixed into th' deal, too—th' two havin' th' reputation of being hand-in-glove. If Cutts had a hand in it, I knew what ter expect.

"I grabbed th' agent's lantern an' hoofed it fer th' river. Down there on the bank I found where canoes had landed; found Walmrac's tracks an' th' track of yer city shoes. Right there I had a purty good idea of what had happened.

"Waal, there I was, caught flat-footed. I'd planned that we'd outfit at th' Cloud River store next mornin', so I didn't have nothin' ready ter start fer th' woods nor nothin'.

"But, sufferin' sunfish, I didn't dare let that outfit that had yer get too much of a lead on me! I beat it back to th' station, sent Judge Winslow a telegram, hustled my canoe, pack, an' rifle down to th' river.

"Fer th' next three hours I rammed that ol' canoe downstream, hell-fer-leather, overtook Cutts' canoe, an' hung

close astern of 'em till daylight. Th' rest of it yer know yerself, Mr. Elliott."

"Tarantula Goan is a city crook," ruminated Elliott. "How does it happen that these woodsmen, miles from his hang-out, are helping him?"

"Through Walmrac, probably," Hood shrewdly guessed. "Walmrac's no woodsman! He jest dresses th' part when he's up in this country—which is only part of th' time. There's lots of smugglin' goes on across th' Canadian line up here. Maybe Goan's at th' bottom of it. Perhaps Walmrac is Goan's lootenant up here. If he is, course Goan's in touch with him all the time. Who knows?"

"Cutts—what about him?" Elliott wanted to know.

"Bill Cutts has got everybuddy guessin' up in this country," said Hood. "'Bout all they know about him is that he traps some, hunts some, an' stays out of sight a whole lot. Maybe he'll show up fer a day or two up in th' Musquocook country.

"A week later he may drift in to Matagammon, fifty miles to th' south, an' buy a few supplies. Next time he's heard from he may be way over west, somewhere around Baker Bog or some of th' French settlements across th' line. One thing about Cutts that everybuddy does know—he's a whale of a good woodsman!"

"And this Smoke Driscoll—the man with the terrible scar?"

"Funny thing about Smoke," mused the guide. "Back ten years ago or more, I worked on th' Allegash drive with Smoke. That was before he got his scar. Then he was jest a big, good-natured kid, full of fun as a cub bear. Plumb reckless, but everybuddy liked the boy.

"Then he dropped out o' sight somewhere, was gone five or six years, an' came back with that scar.

"He was a different Smoke when he came back. Something had changed

him. Wouldn't talk to his best friends. Nobuddy ever did learn what happened to his face.

"Smoke finally took ter runnin' with Bill Cutts, an' has been with him now fer th' last three years. Smoke's mighty nigh as good in th' woods as Cutts himself, a ring-tail snorter of a real good shot."

"Perhaps it's lucky then that his rifle jammed when you were escorting me away from their camp this morning," remarked Elliott dryly.

Hood glanced at the city man sharply. "Smoke's rifle jammed, did it? Huh, that's funny! Yes, sir, danged funny! That's one thing Smoke was always fussy about—his guns, I mean. Uses nothin' but th' best an' puts in hours keepin' 'em in th' pink of condition. Jammed! Huh!"

"You said you sent a wire to Judge Winslow after you found I'd been fooled and carried away by Walmrac and Cutts. Did you tell him anything about it?" asked Elliott anxiously.

"Not a word. I figgered I'd tend to th' matter myself."

"Thank goodness for that! If a message of that kind had ever reached my wife's ears, she'd have worried herself into a nervous breakdown. But what did you tell the judge—if you don't mind telling me?"

"Told him to send an airplane to Tamerack Lake with supplies for us. We'll be needing grub. Yer've got to have heavy clothes an' somethin' different than them shoes to wear on yer feet. We're liable ter get freezin' weather any time now. Yer can't run round th' woods fer a month in that kind of a rig."

"Where's Tamerack Lake?" Elliott wanted to know.

"Now yer askin' fer sad news, Mr. Elliott. Tamerack's right in th' plumb center of nowhere—a good fifty miles from here. An' us afoot! Aw, if I had 'a' used my bean we'd still have our

canoe and could make it easily in three days. As 'tis——"

Hood did not finish what he was about to say, but Elliott sensed something of his thoughts. He took up the guide's speech where it had been dropped.

"As it is, you've got a city tenderfoot on your hands, eh? A man who's hardly been off the sidewalks before in his life. The tenderfoot has got to be nursed along like a sick baby. He's got to be watched every minute. Even at that he will probably pull some of the usual fool stunts of the greenhorn—get lost, set the woods afire, break a leg, cut himself with the ax, or something.

"Then, after all the trouble you're going to have with him, you're not sure but what, through fear of Tarantula Goan's vengeance, the tenderfoot will give himself over into the hands of Goan's men, rather than testify against that murderer. You're up against a pretty stiff proposition, aren't you, Hood?"

Herb Hood paused in his stride. He surveyed the man from the city long and quizzically. "That talk," he said, "is as plain as a moose track in new snow. Here's some more of th' same brand:

"I ain't claimin' ter be tickled ter death with this job Judge Winslow's handed me. I'll admit it looks tough. But I've tackled it. I've promised th' judge to do my dangest, an' that's jest naturally what I'm going to do!"

"You and I both, Hood!" said Elliott quietly. "I saw that murder committed. Two other men, who saw it and were ready to testify, have been silenced forever, doubtless by Goan. Goan may get me too, but unless he does, *I shall go on the witness stand and tell what I saw!*"

"With your help, Hood, I am going to do everything I can to keep out of Goan's clutches. I'm sorry I'm not better fitted to care for myself here in the

woods, but I shall put entire confidence in your judgment. I shall try my best to follow your instructions and make it as easy for you as I can. Now, do we understand each other better?"

"Yer talk up-an'-up, Mr. Elliott—th' way I like ter hear a man speak his piece. Now, le's hit it up fer Tamerack Lake. We got ter get there ahead of that airplane."

TOPPING the ridge, Hood swung away along its sterile crest, where, on the ledges and rocky going, their trail would show but little.

"Soon's Cutts an' his crowd get organized again they'll be after us like a passel of wolves," predicted the guide. "Cutts is sure to pick up our trail sooner or later, but this kind of goin' will hold him up a little. Time is what we've got to play for now."

Twenty miles they covered that day, miles that to Elliott seemed endless. Hood was forever watching the back track, taking every precaution against being overtaken and surprised. They saw nothing of Cutts and his men, however.

When the early November twilight began filling the distant aisles of the forest with deepening shadows, Elliott expected the guide to stop and make camp. He was surprised that Hood kept on. Elliott, who was weary to the point of exhaustion, voiced his first complaint of the day.

"Wow, Hood! Those two pieces of pilot bread you doled out to me this noon have rubbed together in my stomach until they've become darned thin. How long before we camp and eat?"

Hood turned to gaze at the city man admiringly.

"Can yer stand another mile, Mr. Elliott? I'll feel better if we leave that much more trail behind us—*trail that's made after dark.*"

Elliott saw the wisdom of the suggestion. "Go ahead," he told the guide,

and fell doggedly into step behind him.

Hood swung at a sharp right angle to the course they had been following and entered still thicker timber. After twenty minutes they came to a deep little hollow, down which a tiny brook gurgled and laughed in the darkness. Here he stopped.

"This is a good enough camping place," said the guide, slipping from his pack straps. "Nobuddy can see our fire down in this ravine."

Five minutes more and a cheery little blaze was throwing flickering shadows among the somber trunks of the surrounding spruces.

"What can I do to help?" Elliott wanted to know.

Hood looked up in surprise. "Do? After twenty miles in them slippery soled shoes? Guess you've done enough fer to-day. You take it easy."

"Thanks!" said Elliott, appreciatively. "I'm about all in!" He found a comfortable place in the warmth of the blaze and watched the guide at his camp making.

CHAPTER VI.

A HANDY BIRD.

IN a surprisingly short time Hood had cleared the brush from a level spot, picked and laid a bed of fir boughs, and had the breast and drum sticks of a spruce partridge, or "fool-hen" as woodsmen call the bird, broiling on pointed sticks before the fire.

From the guide's smoke-blackened coffeepot, hanging from a slanting pole above the blaze, came the tantalizing aroma of Mocha.

That was their evening meal after twenty miles of rough trail—hard-tack, fool-hen, and coffee. To Elliott it seemed that he had never eaten a meal more appetizing. He remarked something of the kind to the guide.

Hood laughed. "Fool-hen ain't ex-

actly what most folks consider th' keenest of eatin'. Yer see th' birds live on spruce buds considerable in th' winter, when they can't get green feed. Their meat gets ter taste kind o' strong of spruce.

"Still they're a mighty handy bird ter have in th' woods, they're so tame. If a feller gets lost, is out o' ammunition, ain't got a gun or somethin', he can knock one over with a club, like I did this one to-day."

"Or," said Elliott, "if he's followed by some one he's trying to escape from, and don't want to give away his whereabouts by a shot, he can do the same, eh? So that's the reason you didn't shoot some of that flock of ruffed grouse that we scared up into the trees to-day, is it?"

"That's th' reason," grinned Hood. "You're learnin', Mr. Elliott."

"It looks," said Elliott between mouthfuls of fool-hen, "as if there'd be plenty of opportunity for me to learn much more before I'm out of the woods again. Well, I'm willing to learn—guess I'd like the woods if I knew more about them. By the way, Hood, how do we get out—when we're ready to go, I mean?"

"I ain't sure about that myself. I expect th' plane that brings us supplies will also bring instructions from Judge Winslow. That's why I'm so danged anxious ter get ter Tamerack an' meet it."

"I told th' judge in my telegram we'd be lookin' fer th' plane Thursday—an' to-day's Tuesday. Yer see, I didn't figger we'd have ter go to Tamerack overland, afoot."

"That means that we've got to do thirty miles to-morrow, doesn't it?"

"Mighty clost to it," admitted Hood.

Elliott wiggled the toes of his painfully blistered feet. Tentatively he stretched a leg, trying the stiffening muscles. Could he reel off thirty miles more of forest travel on the morrow?

Deep within him he doubted his ability to do it.

Hood had Elliott out of his blanket long before daylight next morning. Hard-tack and coffee—then on toward Tamerack again.

Stiff as he was, the first mile was exquisite torture for the city man. Each muscle and sinew of his body had its separate ache. His feet, bruised and blistered as they were, had swelled during the night. It had been all he could do to force them into his ragged shoes before starting. Now they were hurting him more with each step.

His shoes, too, were fast going to pieces. The uppers had been ripped to ribbons by snags and brush. The soles of both had worn through. But Elliott was game. He gritted his teeth and stumbled in the wake of the guide.

Secretly Hood had been watching him closely. Now he stopped and cut birch-bark inner soles which he helped Elliott place in his shoes. For a time these helped.

Then the bark frayed, rolled into bunches beneath Elliott's tender feet and made bad matters worse. By ten o'clock they had covered but ten miles, and Elliott was a wreck.

Without a word, Hood sat down upon a fallen log, pulled off his moccasins and tossed them to Elliott.

"Put 'em on," he ordered.

Elliott flushed. "Not on your life, Hood! Think I'm that kind of a piker?"

"I been watchin' yer cripple along in them danged shoes long enough ter know mighty well yer no piker! Jest th' same, yer put on them mocs. I'll cut up a blanket an' fix myself some guffins of some kind. We got ter make Tamerack!"

To their mutual surprise and disappointment, they discovered that Elliott could not get his feet into the moccasins. Although weighing sixty pounds more than the city man, Hood wore a shoe two sizes smaller.

"Guess I'll have to rig the guffins for you instead of myself," said Hood.

With his hunting knife, he stripped a blanket into six-inch widths. The stripes he swathed skillfully around Elliott's bruised and blistered feet.

The loose, comfortable guffins acted almost like a powerful restorative to Elliott, made a new man of him. His feet still hurt, but those stabbing pains which had been shooting halfway to his thighs with every step ceased.

By two o'clock they had made another ten miles. They had seen no signs of pursuit. Hood was in high spirits.

As they paused for breath among the scattered boulders of a ridge crest, the guide remarked:

"It'll be dark about five thirty. That leaves us three hours and a half of daylight to make Tamerack in. How's th' dogs, Mr. Elliott? Think yer can make it?"

"I'm game to——"

Elliott, his speech suddenly cut short, spun like a teetotum and pitched, face down, into the underbrush.

SOME ONE was shaking Elliott, whispering in his ear:

"Hey! Mr. Elliott! Hey! Hey! Wake up!"

Why couldn't they let a fellow sleep when he was comfortable, wondered Elliott, peevishly. He opened his eyes.

It was dark. Above, through gently swaying limbs of trees, stars peeped down from a night sky. A dark shadow hanging above him moved. Some one shook his shoulder. The movement caused hot needles to jab at Elliott's brain.

"Lay off!" he mumbled, trying weakly to push the hand away. "Head's coming—to pieces. Water!"

The man above him sighed and spoke. "Man, that's th' best music I've heard for a long time! Here's yer water. Lemme get an arm under yer head."

Elliott tried to lift his head. It felt strange. He lifted an unsteady hand to it—to find it bandaged from eyes to crown. What was wrong?

"That you, Hood? What—what happened?"

"Feelin' better, Mr. Elliott?"

"Feeling rocky. What happened?"

"That danged Levacue shoved a bullet through yer hair too blamed close ter yer brain. They was all around us back there on the ridge before I knew it. I winged Levacue—not bad enough, cuss th' luck—drug yer in under a shelvin' boulder an' stood 'em off till dark. Then I sneaked yer away from there. They think we're still hidin' under the boulder back there, I guess."

"Where are we?"

"'Bout a mile from where th' scrap took place, up on th' side of a bluff."

"What time is it?" asked Elliott.

"That's what's beginnin' ter worry me," said Hood. "It'll be daylight in another hour. We got ter do somethin' about gittin' ter Tamerack. This is Thursday an' th' plane is due."

Elliott sat up. Blinding pain shot through his head. He caught his breath sharply with the agony of it. He remained sitting for a moment but the effort was sickening. Nausea seized upon him. He fell back with a mournful groan.

"That settles that!" said Hood with grim conviction. "Yer never can make Tamerack to-day. Hard luck, I'll say! Never mind, Mr. Elliott, we'll hang out here till you're better."

"We'll do nothing of the kind, Hood! You've got to meet that plane, and you know it! Leave me water and grub and beat it for Tamerack. Get back here when you can."

"Meetin' that plane is about our only hope," admitted Hood. "But I hate ter think what'd happen if Cutts an' his bunch finds you here."

"If I only had a gun," said Elliott thoughtfully. "I've done a little gallery

shooting. Sometimes I can get 'em on the target."

"I'll leave ol' meat-in-the-pot fer yer," offered Hood, "and a coupla handfuls of ca'tridges. There's a kind of a cave jest above us here. Only one man at a time can squeeze through th' entrance. Should them critters find yer, an' should yer spatter a bullet or two into th' rocks outside, maybe they'd be a little leary about crawlin' in ter git yer."

"It's the only bet we've got, Hood. Help me get into the cave, will you?"

The guide helped Elliott into the cave, made him comfortable, brought water in the coffeepot.

"Gosh, I hate ter go an' leave yer like this!" he lamented. "I'll be back as soon as 'tis good an' dark to-night—too risky to come by daylight.

"If one of them bozos shows his ugly mug in th' entrance of this cave, yer do yer dangest ter drive a bullet plumb into his teeth. Don't take a chance with 'em. They're out ter get yer, never fergit it! So long!"

CHAPTER VII.

AGE-OLD INSTINCT.

LEFT alone, Elliott got out a small pocket mirror and unwound the bandages that the guide had placed about his head. He found that Levacue's bullet had cut a deep furrow above one ear.

Wetting his handkerchief with cold water from the coffeepot, he bathed the wound gently for an hour. He rewound the bandages. The simple treatment helped wonderfully. Now, unless he moved his head quickly, the sharp pains came no more.

He removed the strips of blanket and used all the water but that which he saved for drinking purposes to bathe his swollen feet.

When he had finished he felt so much better that he moved his blanket near the mouth of the cave and sat down

with his back against the wall to watch the glory of the forest sunrise.

On the hardwood ridge, across the little valley below the cave, blue jays and squirrels were bickering over the beechnuts that the heavy frost of the night had dropped from their prickly burs.

The distance was not so great but what Elliott could, now and then, catch a fleeting glimpse of blue or red as the little woods people scurried among the fallen leaves in search of their breakfast. No more peaceful scene could be found anywhere.

Suddenly, high on the dead limb of a mighty beech, a sinister blue-gray shape tipped forward on its perch and glanced downward with the swiftness of a falling spear. There was a tiny, agonized squeak. Jays hurried away on panicky wings.

The blue-gray projectile spread broad piñons to rise through the treetops and wing in unhurried flight straight across the valley toward Elliott's cave. From its curved talons dangled a limp form.

The great hawk settled on a boulder within thirty feet of where Elliott was sitting and proceeded to devour the squirrel it had killed. The bird was so near that Elliott could see the savage flash of its golden eyes as, with hooked beak, it ripped and tore at its victim.

The realization was borne in upon Elliott that he had witnessed an illustration of one of the cruel forest axioms—kill to live. He shuddered a bit, flourished his hat at the hawk and drove it from its grisly feast. The thing was too suggestive of the fate he had twice narrowly escaped.

The morning wore on. Midforenoon arrived. Bird and animal life, that had been so active with the dawn, quieted.

Then, along the ridge across from the cave, came a great buck. The deer was in full leap. Its white "flag" was raised in alarm, flared out like an almond-shaped fan, gleaming like a blob

of snow through the leafless timber. Elliott sat up with sudden interest to watch the animal.

The buck slashed up the side of the ridge in mighty leaps, gained the crest, whirled in its tracks, and stood, a shadowy statue, watching its back track.

The age-old hunting instinct welled up within Elliott. Cautiously he reached for the rifle which lay beside him, raised it, and covered the deer. The white bead of the foresight trembled fairly against the red-gray background of the deer's shoulder.

"How easy!" thought Elliott. "How easy! And I may never have another chance like this at a deer! If I wasn't hiding out like a skulking animal now. But 'twon't do! As still as it is this morning, Cutts and his crew could hear a shot for five——"

Spang!

The buck on the opposite ridge reared, twisted, and plunged down, to lie a crumpled heap of red and white in the underbrush.

Elliott gasped in astonishment and looked at the rifle in his hands. From its muzzle curled a thin wisp of smoke. Unconsciously he had squeezed the trigger too hard.

Fool! Fool! Fool! What would Hood say? Would Cutts and his crowd hear that shot? How could they help it? Even yet its echoes were bellying among the wooded hills.

Elliott glanced out across the valley again. A movement near where the deer had appeared caught his eye. His heart skipped several beats as a man stepped into view from a fir thicket. The man was Smoke Driscoll.

Driscoll's scarred face was turned toward the cave. His single eye was sweeping the face of the ridge, searching it in minute detail. Elliott dared not breathe.

Up on the opposite ridge crest the dying buck made a last, convulsive

struggle. Driscoll heard it. His head turned in that direction for a moment.

Elliott saw his chance. Quietly he worked the lever of the rifle, jacking a fresh cartridge into the chamber, and brought the sights to bear full on Driscoll's broad chest. Tarantula Goan's men had twice come within an ace of making it "curtains" for him. Well, there'd be one less of them to cope with from now on, he'd make sure of that!

Then, even as Elliott's finger was curling upon the trigger, Smoke Driscoll did a very surprising thing. He faced back toward the cave and raised an arm above his head, the hand held open, palm outward—the universal sign of peace.

For a long moment Smoke Driscoll stood there, a grisly yet heroic figure. Then, dropping his arm, he turned unconcernedly away and climbed the ridge to the fallen deer.

ELLIOTT lowered the rifle and watched Driscoll in puzzled astonishment. Surely he could not shoot the man down after that unmistakable signal of amity. What could it mean?

Driscoll reached the deer and, without looking again in the direction of the cave, began slowly to remove the mackinaw he wore. He tossed the garment upon a near-by rock, laid his rifle upon it, and rolled up his sleeves.

Even to Elliott, untrained as he was in the ways of the woods, it was evident that the man was preparing to dress the deer.

From beyond the ridge some one called, guardedly.

Driscoll answered loudly, carelessly. A minute more and Cutts and Walmrac appeared.

Cutts took one look at Driscoll, so calmly at work upon the deer, and burst into angry speech.

"What th' hell d'ye think yer doin', Smoke—shootin' a deer when we're right on top o' them fellers?"

Smoke Driscoll did not even look up from his work.

"Bacon three times a day," he said calmly, "is all right if you like it. Me—I figured I'd have a taste of deer meat. As for being on top of Hood and Elliott, I'll bet they're five miles from here. I've combed these ridges with a fine-toothed comb. Not a sign!"

Elliott found himself breathing again. For some reason Driscoll had protected him, claimed the deer, lied for him. The thing was inexplicable but so. Elliott crouched lower in the cave entrance and listened with all his ears.

Walmrac's thick lips twisted in a sneer. "I thought you guys were woodsmen!" he jeered. "Blah, you couldn't follow a cow's track in new snow on a bright day!"

Cutts made no reply, just turned away and began filling his pipe.

Not so Smoke Driscoll. Straightening up to his towering height, he shook his red-stained hunting knife within an inch of Walmrac's face.

"Listen here, Walmrac," he said coldly. "Bill, there, can take that stuff if he wants to. I won't! What do you know about the woods, you gutter rat? Put you down a dark alley with a blackjack in your mitt, or behind a machine gun in a taxicab, and you'd probably be good.

"Up here you're excess baggage! We've done the best we could for you. The trouble is we're up against a *regular* woodsman. Hood's stunt of coming into our camp back there on the Cloud and taking Elliott away from us ought to prove that to you.

"We'll pick up their trail again, no doubt. Probably we'll get hold of Elliott somehow—though it isn't going to be easy. Meantime, Walmrac, you quit your beefing, see!"

"The chief will hear about this!" threatened Walmrac.

"Goan? Aw, hell!" snorted Driscoll, and bent again to his work.

Cutts' bearded face was turned toward the sky. "Listen!" he warned.

A distant, throbbing murmur came to Elliott's ears, a murmur which grew louder with each moment. Instantly he recognized it as the drone of an airplane motor.

So Judge Winslow had received Hood's telegram and had sent the plane after all, had he? By this time Hood should be at Tamerack to meet it, too. Now if it wasn't for the jam he was in here, things would be looking fairly bright again.

Across the valley the three men were watching the heavens intently. Suddenly Smoke Driscoll raised his red knife and pointed.

"There she is—just under that big white cloud! A hydro-monoplane, I'd say. Boy, ain't she a beaut'! Huh, that's funny! That bird just cut the gun, wonder what for? There she goes into a peach of a spiral—acts like he's going to land. He is going to land! Ah, she's flattening out now! There she goes below the treetops. Must be Tamerack Lake he dropped into, eh, Bill?"

Cutts nodded. "Yeah, Tamerack, all right. But why? Well, maybe Levacue kin tell us somethin' about it when he gits back to camp. I sent him off that way this mornin', ter see if he could pick up Hood's and Elliott's trails."

Smoke Driscoll stood as one in a trance, his scarred face turned toward the point on the distant horizon where the plane had disappeared. He seemed to be entirely lost to his surroundings. Walmrac, who was watching him closely, spoke.

"Come on! Come on, Smoke! Finish your job on that deer and le's go. What's the matter with you, didn't you ever see a plane before?"

Driscoll swung upon Walmrac savagely. His disfigured face was horrible in its intensity. "You——"

He caught himself, relaxed, and bent

again to his work. "I've seen pictures of them in the papers," he told Walmrac, evenly.

Five minutes later, to Elliott's relief, Smoke Driscoll swung the hind quarters and saddle of the buck to his superb shoulders, and the three men disappeared in the timber.

CHAPTER VIII.

BUSHED!

THE remainder of the day passed uneventfully. Elliott's thoughts, however, were busy with the strange conduct of Smoke Driscoll. For hours he pondered the unexpected twist. What object the man had in protecting him, Elliott could not imagine.

With darkness Hood returned. He brought news both good and bad.

The plane had arrived, bringing all needful supplies, including a tent. Chapin, the pilot, had made a successful landing. Then, as he taxied across to where Hood awaited him on the shore, he had unwittingly passed over shallows near a small island. Sharp rocks had ripped the pontoons of the hydro-monoplane wide open.

"I was watchin' her," the guide told Elliott. "When she hit those rocks I thought fer a second she was goin' ter stand plumb on her nose. But she didn't. Th' motor stopped, her tail come down level, and there she set on her legs, or whatever yer call 'em, in two feet of water.

"I yelled half a dozen times. Got no answer. Knew somethin' was wrong. So I dragged a couple o' old logs into th' water, lashed them together with some limber birch sprouts, an' poles myself to cross to th' island.

"When I got to th' plane an' found Chapin, he was slumped down in th' cockpit, face all gore, as limp as a dish rag. Out!

"Chapin said afterward that his safety belt wasn't hooked. Th' jolt hove him

ahead, face first, slap into th' wind deflector. Believe me, Mr. Elliott, the metal frame of that deflector did things to poor Chapin's face!

"Waal, I got Chapin onto th' island and brought him to. First thing he says was: 'Did I cut that switch?' Seems he saw th' rocks a split-second before he hit 'em, an' was reachin' for his ignition when th' crash came. Luck he got it. She'd nosed over if he hadn't.

"I bandaged up Chapin's head. Gosh, he's cut an' bruised like blazes around th' eyes. Won't fly again for a while, I guess. Then I unloaded th' plane, set up th' tent, fixed things comfortable for Chapin, an' started back after you. How've yer made it to-day? Seen anything of Cutts an' his outfit?"

"Have I!" said Elliott, and told the guide of the astonishing thing that Smoke Driscoll had done.

For a long time Hood said nothing. Then:

"That's th' second time Smoke's pulled that stuff. There sure must be somethin' behind it!"

"Second time—what do you mean?" asked Elliott.

"Now that this has happened," said the guide, "I believe more than ever that Smoke jammed his rifle a-purpose when we had that mix-up back there on th' Cloud. What d'yer suppose it means?"

"It meant a lot to me to-day!" said Elliott, thankfully.

Hood agreed.

"Here, Mr. Elliott," said the guide, tossing a bundle to the city man. "Climb inter them clothes an' lumbermen's rubbers, an' le's be on our way back ter Tamerack. Th' judge sure knew what yer needed fer clothes.

"An' that ain't all, neither. He sent us flash lights, another rifle, an' I'll be danged if I didn't find a foldin' canvas boat stowed in th' plane. We won't have ter cross Tamerack on a raft no more."

The day of rest had done much to restore Elliott. With the comfortable rubbers and soft woolen socks that Judge Winslow had sent, his bruised feet troubled him but little. They reached the island in Tamerack Lake without mishap.

ON the deep bed of fir boughs that Hood had fixed for him, Chapin was resting comfortably. His head was bandaged until none of his features was visible, but he propped himself up on an elbow and reached a groping hand to shake with Elliott.

"Glad to meet you, Mr. Elliott. Fine piece of business I pulled off, wasn't it—slamming the old crate onto those rocks? Hood says it ripped her pontoons nearly off from her.

"Maybe we can patch her up, though, after I get so I can use my eyes again. By the way, there's a couple of letters for you in the pocket of my leather coat—one from your wife, the other from Judge Winslow."

By the light of the camp fire that Hood had started before the tent, Elliott went swiftly through the letters. His family was safe and well. Judge Winslow's letter was cheerful. He said that the plane would remain until the twentieth of the month and then bring Elliott back to the city.

Judge Winslow expressed his regret that he could not be at Tamerack with them to enjoy the camping trip. He also sent his best regards to Herb Hood.

The good news did much to buoy up Elliott's spirits. He read the judge's letter aloud to Hood.

The guide was thoughtful after hearing the letter.

"Plane's goin' ter stay until th' twentieth, eh? I reckon there's one little point th' judge slipped up on."

"Slipped—how?" asked Elliott.

Hood turned to Chapin. "A hydro-plane has to have water to take off from, don't it, Chapin?"

"Sure!" mumbled the pilot through his bandages.

"Waal, th' chances are that by th' twentieth there'll be six inches of ice on Tamerack. She's freezin' a little round th' shores right now."

"Hell!" said Chapin. "That's right!"

"And," continued the guide, "another thing th' judge didn't know when he said he'd like to be here with us, is that Bill Cutts an' his outfit are goin' ter make life a burden for us when they locate us—which they're purty sure to do."

"Who is Cutts?" the pilot wanted to know.

Hood told him.

Chapin bewailed his ill fortune in crackling phrases. "The plane cracked up, a beautiful fight in the making, and me just the same as blind. To fix up our sky sled is our only bet. If she stays out there on that reef there's no telling what a strong wind might do to her. Oh, if my lamps were only functioning!"

"I'll see what I can do about her in the morning," said Hood, quietly.

At daybreak the guide was searching the scanty timber of the island for logs suitable to his purpose. The steady *plock-plock* of his ax echoed in ridges around Tamerack. Maybe the sound would give away their whereabouts to Cutts, but logs they must have.

By main strength Hood rolled and dragged the logs to the shore and rolled them into the lake. With poles he and Elliott pushed them along the shore and collected twenty or more near the stranded plane. Then, plunging into the icy water to his waist, Hood began the construction of a raft.

It was not for nothing that Hood had worked long winters in the logging camps. Ingenious levers and their application were as much a part of his woods knowledge as was the setting of a fox trap. Now he rigged levers, and raised the heavy plane an inch at a

time, until her damaged pontoons were clear of the water. The raft was floated under her and she was lowered onto it.

The weight of the ship sank the raft low in the water, but Hood had the plane afloat. He towed it into a sheltered cove a hundred yards below the tent, and anchored it securely.

That night, deep in the spruces of the mainland, the guide sighted a pin point of flickering blaze.

Hood, drying out his clothes by the camp fire, watched it critically for a moment. "It's Cutts," he decided. "I knew danged well they'd find us. Been watchin' us all day maybe. Wish I knew what their plans are. B'ginger, I believe I'll try an' find out!"

Later the guide took the canvas boat and paddled silently away from the island.

ELLIOTT changed the bandages on Chapin's head, then sat down by the fire to await Hood's return. Hours later he heard a strange crunching tinkle out on the lake. For a moment he could not imagine what the noise might be. Then it came to him. It was a boat crunching through thin ice. Hood was returning.

The guide's report was none too cheerful. "I crept up on their camp an' listened to 'em talk fer an hour," he told Elliott. "Seems that Walmrac is headin' back fer Cloud River Station first thing in th' mornin'. He's makin' fer th' city ter get in touch with Taramtula Goan.

"They think they've got us now—an' ter be honest with yer, I ain't so sure but what they're right. Some one in th' bunch has got binoculars. They've found out th' plane's busted. They figger we're tied up here on th' island fer a long time.

"Walmrac says that when Goan finds that out, he'll come in here with another plane an' blow th' island clean off th' map with bombs. Seems that Goan is

a flyer—owns a plane of his own. Nice pleasant outlook, eh?"

"I should say so! What are we going to do?" asked Elliott anxiously.

"One thing we ain't goin' ter do—that's lay down an' take it! We've got two rifles an' a lot of lead pills ter fit 'em. Goan'll think he's tackled a box car full of bobcats!"

"But *bombs*, Hood! He'll blow us into kingdom come!"

"Maybe not. Walmrac can't get to th' city in less than four days. That gives us considerable time. We'll try an' be ready for Goan when he comes."

"Don't you think those pontoons can be fixed? Perhaps Chapin will be able to fly before then."

"Sorry, Mr. Elliott, but 'tain't goin' ter do no good ter fix them pontoons. There'll be an inch of ice on Tamerack in th' mornin'."

"After it gets thick enough to bear a man, couldn't we get away over it? There surely should be some way to outwit those criminals," said Elliott.

"It's part of their plan ter see that we don't do that," the guide told him. "Cutts, Smoke, an' th' Frenchman are goin' ter watch this island night an' day. They've all got long-range rifles. All of 'em are good shots. We wouldn't last a minute out on th' open ice."

"Can't we make a get-away to-night, now, before the lake freezes?"

"We might, but what about Chapin there—travelin' in th' woods when he's jest th' same as blind?"

Elliott groaned. "We're trapped!"

"Bushed!" agreed Hood, grimly.

CHAPTER IX.

LONG-RANGE SHOOTING.

TRUE to the guide's prediction, Tamerack froze in the night. The inch or more of tough, black ice made the use of the hydroplane impossible, even had its pontoons been uninjured and Chapin able to fly it.

There seemed little sense in working on the plane now, so Hood turned his attention to the construction of a place that would afford shelter of a kind from Goan's murderous bombs.

Back among the spruces, Hood found two boulders, each the size of a small room. Between the rocks was a space of perhaps five feet. The guide roofed this space with heavy logs and then began covering the logs with layer upon layer of heavy, flat rocks.

The rocks had to be brought from the lake shore, some little distance away so the bomb-proofing progressed rather slowly.

Elliott tried to help. He was unused to such heavy labor. Sharp rocks tore his hands and pinched his fingers. He stumbled and fell with his heavy loads.

Hood, noting the city man's distress, made him quit.

"You pick up some driftwood for the camp fire an' tend to Chapin, Mr. Elliott. I'll finish this cellar. Tarantula Goan'll have ter bring a Big Bertha with him ter ever reach us through th' walls of that igloo!

"By th' way, I see that Cutts has got his men posted, watchin' th' island. I've spotted them when I've been huntin' th' shore line fer flat rocks. One of 'em is on th' shore over there by their camping place, another down in th' cove at th' lower end of th' lake.

"Another—Smoke Driscoll, I think—is stationed on th' end of that point that reaches out toward the island right opposite th' cove where th' plane is. Tamerack's small enough so they can check up on us mighty clost! If th' lake was much smaller, they'd be tryin' now an' then a shot at us from the shore."

Next morning, when Elliott removed the bandages from Chapin's eyes, it was to find that the swelling had subsided materially. The pilot was delighted to discover that he could see a bit.

"Glory be!" he exulted. "This means I haven't got to hang around the tent any longer. I'm going down and have a slant at the old bus." He stumbled uncertainly away in the direction of the cove.

Hood went back to work on the shelter. Elliott busied himself about the tent.

It was difficult for the city man to keep his mind on his task. The time was drawing near when Tarantula Goan might be swooping above the island, dropping death and destruction from a plane.

Because he, Elliott, had been unlucky enough to witness a murder, because he had been honest enough to *admit* that he witnessed it, Hood, Chapin, and himself must pass through the flaming hell of an aerial bomb raid.

A sudden yell from the cove jerked Elliott's mind from these somber channels.

Chapin was coming toward the tent, running as fast as his limited vision would permit. There was something white in the hand he was waving so wildly above his head. With every stride he cried out excited, incoherent words.

At the shelter, Hood heard the pilot's yells. In mighty leaps he, too, came running. Guide and pilot reached the tent at the same instant.

"Hey, see what I found tied to the control stick of the bus!" Chapin cried, shoving a piece of birch bark into Hood's hand. "Who put it there? And why didn't I think of that stunt myself? Whoopee, gents, we'll fly out of Tamerack yet!"

Hood was studying the message, a puzzled frown on his face. Elliott edged in curiously. On the bark was written:

Put skis under her.

"Skis?" mumbled Hood. "What——"

"Sure!" yelled Chapin, cutting a hot

buck-and-wing step. "Skis instead of pontoons! We can take off the ice then, see? Skis were tried out last winter by some of the flyers. Successful take-offs can be made with them from snow and ice. I'm dumb or I'd thought of it myself! But say, how come that note in the ship? Who put it there?"

The eyes of Hood and Elliott met. Their lips parted to voice at the same instant the name that leaped into their minds:

"Smoke Driscoll!"

"Why?"

"Who knows?"

"How'd he get here—and when?"

"Must 'a' crossed that treacherous ice in the dark," said Hood. "I didn't figger anybuddy would be crazy enough to try that stunt! That's why I ain't done anything about keepin' a lookout."

"That's three times he's managed to help us," observed Elliott. "Must be he'd like to see us get away."

"Looks like," admitted Hood, thoughtfully.

Chapin was all enthusiastic to get to work on the plane. "We can fix her up, I know we can! I've got a pretty complete set of tools there in the ship."

"Hood, you're mighty clever with the ax. While you're looking up a pair of small, dry spruces to hew a pair of skis out of, I'll be getting those damaged floats out from under her."

"We won't have to change her understructure such a whole lot to attach the skis. She'll carry all of us and the camping outfit. We'll hop out of Tamerack and leave Cutts and his gang to tell Tarantula Goan the story when he arrives."

"There must be some other lake or pond, miles from here, that's frozen over, where we can land and remain under cover until the twentieth, isn't there, Hood?"

"I know of a place," said Hood quietly.

"All right then, big boy, get busy with that ax of yours!"

BY nightfall the pontoons of the plane had been removed and skis affixed in their stead. It was a rude job, but Chapin pronounced it usable.

"The cold to-night ought to strengthen the ice so that it will be safe to take off from," said the pilot. "I'll take her up the first thing in the morning and give her a test flight. If those skis work—and I believe they will—we'll be miles from here before Goan arrives."

After sitting idle for so long in the cold, the motor of the plane was slow in starting. Chapin labored like a slave and swore like a pirate for an hour before he got a single cough from her frosty cylinders.

Then, as cylinder after cylinder caught and their explosions blended into a long, roaring promise of mighty power, the little pilot's battered features broke into a cheerful grin, and he began fastening his safety belt.

As Hood and Elliott were standing by, watching Chapin warm his motor in preparation for his trial flight, a bullet ripped chips from the ice at the guide's feet and screamed angrily as it ricocheted across the island.

Cutts, seeing them grouped about the plane and hearing the motor start, realized that they were trying for a get-away. He had opened fire.

A moment later a wisp of hazy powder smoke sprang from the shore line of the cove down where Levacue was concealed, and a bullet skittered up the ice to smack into the boulders of the shore.

Hood grabbed Elliott's arm and hurried him into the shelter of the island's sparse growth.

"Too far for 'em to do accurate shootin', but there's no sense in makin' targets of ourselves."

"While Chapin's makin' his test flight, if you'll yank down th' tent an' roll the

outfit in it, I'll watch them yarhoos on th' shore ter make sure they don't break across th' ice to th' island."

With nervous fingers, Elliott began slackening the guy ropes of the tent. He heard the drone of the plane rise to a higher pitch. Raising his head, he was in time to see Chapin shoot the ship out of the cove and take the air.

Ah, she would fly! Another ten minutes and they would be safely away.

Through the roar of Chapin's circling ship came the sharp stutter of a rifle from the crest of the island. Hood was shooting, holding Cutts or some of his men from crossing the ice.

In feverish haste, Elliott dumped blankets and utensils onto the now flattened tent, rolled the whole into one compact bundle, and lashed it tight with the guy ropes.

There, it was done! Now he'd better get the stuff down to the cove and in readiness to load into the plane. Swinging the roll to his shoulders, and picking up the extra rifle, he started toward the ice.

Apparently satisfied with the performance of his ship, Chapin completed his test flight. He brought the plane down and taxied slowly into the cove. Elliott saw him climb out of the cockpit, leaving the motor idling, and kneel beneath the plane to tighten one of the lashings that held a ski in place.

CHAPTER X.

THE DEATH STUNT.

SUDDENLY a new note came down the morning wind. It was a sound that sent a chill leaping to Elliott's heart—the roar of another airplane motor.

Up on the crest of the island, Hood yelled warningly.

Elliott dropped the roll of camp duffel and turned his face to the sky.

Down out of the blue swept a lean, yellow plane. She was yet high but

even though the distance was great, Elliott could hear her struts and wires screeching with the terrific speed of her dive. At five hundred feet her pilot pulled up her nose, flattened her out, and circled the island.

Elliott could see two helmeted heads peering over the side of the plane's yellow fuselage. Tarantula Goan was deliberately sizing up the situation on the island before loosening his bombs.

Elliott was paralyzed. Not with fear particularly, but with the uncertainty of what to do. Never before in his life had he been faced with conditions which demanded such rapid decision, such directness of action. He ran toward Chapin and the plane.

Three strides, then the thing that the city man saw on the ice jerked him up short in his tracks.

Smoke Driscoll had left his place of concealment on the point opposite the cove. With the swiftness of a deer, he was racing across the ice, straight toward the unsuspecting Chapin and his plane.

Even now, such was the distance Driscoll had covered while Elliott had been watching Goan's plane, he was well within fifty feet of Chapin.

Elliott threw up his rifle.

Driscoll, who was watching Elliott as he ran, slackened his pace not a particle. Instead, he flung both empty hands high in the air, showing that he was unarmed.

Into Elliott's mind flashed the memory of what the man had done for him back there by the cave on the ridge, of the strange jamming of Driscoll's rifle at the camp on the Cloud, of the inexplicable message telling them to fit skis to the plane. Could it be that this was another friendly act?

Elliott had no way of knowing for sure. He lowered his rifle.

Driscoll raced on.

Chapin saw him. Gamely enough the little pilot ducked out from under the

plane and stepped forward to meet the running giant.

Smoke Driscoll did not slacken his pace. One of his arms flicked out—at least it looked to Elliott as if it were but a flick. Chapin turned completely over in the air, struck on the ice ten feet away, limp and semiconscious.

Driscoll was above the pilot instantly, stooping over him, shoving something into Chapin's pocket. In the next breath he had leaped to the forward cockpit of the plane. The idling purr of the motor became a vibrant roar under his touch. The ship leaped forward toward the open ice of the lake.

"He's stealing the plane!" yelled Elliott, to nobody in particular. He caught the toss of Smoke Driscoll's wind-blown hair through the sights of his rifle.

A powerful hand wrenched the rifle from Elliott's grasp and sent it spinning away to explode harmlessly among the rocks where it fell. Herb Hood, panting slightly from his swift run from the crest of the island, stood beside the bewildered city man and watched Smoke Driscoll take the ship gracefully into the air.

"Are you crazy, Hood?" yelled Elliott. "Don't you see what's happening? He's stealing the ship!"

"Looks like," was the guide's laconic reply, but his eyes never left the ship.

Out on the ice of the cove, Chapin sat up and looked about him in a bewildered sort of a way.

ABOVE, Tarantula Goan's yellow ship edged in over the island. From her undercarriage something fell in a glancing streak.

Back where the dying embers of the camp fire sent a thin blue streamer of smoke toward the winterish sky, high explosive hurled tons of rocks and dirt heavenward.

So intent were they upon the flying of Smoke Driscoll that neither Hood,

Elliott, or Chapin glanced in the direction of the flying débris.

Driscoll had attained considerable altitude now. He was putting Chapin's plane through maneuver after hair-raising maneuver, seemingly testing the flying qualities of the ship.

Some of the stunts were so spectacular as to take even the breath of the air-hardened Chapin.

"Can that guy fly!" he yelled. "Look at that wing-over!"

Goan circled aimlessly over the lower end of the lake, watching Driscoll. Then Goan headed for the island to drop more bombs.

Smoke Driscoll must have been watching the yellow ship, waiting for this move. He nosed down in a long glide, met Goan's plane, did a vertical bank, and came flying back, wing-tip to wing-tip with Goan, continually edging the yellow plane away from the island.

Goan swung an arm angrily, motioning Driscoll away from him. Driscoll disregarded the gesture and crowded Goan's plane more than ever.

As the two planes swept the watchers on the island, they saw Smoke Driscoll stand in the cockpit of his plane, turn squarely toward Goan and point accusingly to his scarred face.

Goan stared unbelievably for a moment. His plane wobbled and for an instant nearly went out of control.

Down from the sky, cutting through the roar of racing motors, drifted a wild laugh—the laugh of Smoke Driscoll. In that laugh was the timbre of madness.

Driscoll did a barrel roll and was on top of Goan, riding his tail, forcing him down.

Goan dived, leveled, went into a bank so sharply as almost to sweep the ice with his lower wing-tip. Coming out of the bank, he climbed his ship steeply, trying to get above Driscoll.

Driscoll was still above the yellow ship, however. It seemed he had no

intention of letting her attain the altitude she needed so badly. Once more he was driving with roaring motor straight at Goan's plane.

Goan twisted his head, saw screaming death plunging toward him and attempted to escape it by straightaway speed. Down the lake he roared, dropping bomb after bomb as he went, in an attempt to lighten his ship. Shattering explosions threw ice and water high in the air and left a row of gaping, jagged holes in the lake ice.

Gradually, Smoke Driscoll overtook the fleeing plane. Slowly, mercilessly, he lowered his speeding ship until its propeller was spinning not ten feet above Goan's helmeted head.

Walmrac, in the rear cockpit of Goan's plane, raised his arm. Again and again the heavy automatic in his hand belched violet flame at the scarred face in the plane above him.

Smoke Driscoll waved a derisive hand and eased his plane a trifle lower.

Goan had no altitude for a dive to safety. He tried to spin out from under Driscoll in a sharp bank. As he brought his ship about, its dipping wing brushed the tip of a mighty spruce on the shore line.

There was a sharp splintering of wing structure, a rip of tearing fabric. The yellow plane staggered. Goan gave her full gun. By some superhuman effort, he pulled up her nose. She climbed crazily for a moment, faltered sickeningly, then, wing over wing, she plunged down to crash through the thin ice of the cove.

Smoke Driscoll zoomed up away from the treetops and glanced back over his shoulder at the patch of black water where the plane had disappeared. He executed a beautiful loop—a solemn gesture of victory. He brought the plane down and sat her on the ice as if she were a thistledown.

Taxiing slowly across the cove, he cut his switch and climbed down to the

thin ice. Then, facing the three astonished men, he inclined his head in a solemn bow.

"Thank you, gentlemen!" he said gravely. He turned and strode unhurriedly across the ice to the wooded point on the mainland.

CHAPTER XI.

A TRAGIC NOTE.

SILENTLY Hood, Elliott, and Chapin watched him go. They saw him reach the point, saw him lift a pack sack from the ground, pick up a rifle. Without a backward look, he strode away into the timber.

Chapin got up from the ice where he had been sitting during the entire air duel. Slowly he clambered up the bank. "Well," he said, a strange choke in his voice, "it looks as if the show was over. How that Scar-face can fly!"

Elliott looked at Hood. The guide's eyes were fixed thoughtfully on the spot in the distant spruces where Smoke Driscoll had disappeared. A mixed expression of perplexity, admiration, and pity crept slowly over his weather-browned face.

"Why did Driscoll do that?" asked Elliott.

"I wish ter Heaven I knew!" said the guide, fervently.

The practical Chapin spoke up.

"Well, are we pulling out of here, or what?"

Elliott thought the situation over. "I suppose I may as well go home now," he said. "With Goan and his lieutenant both dead, there'll be little danger for me in the city. It was himself that Goan was trying to protect, rather than that poor tool of his whom I must testify against.

"Also I think Judge Winslow should know about this. Perhaps, by striking when the gangsters are without leaders, the police may make a thorough clean-up."

Then Elliott remembered something. He turned sharply to Chapin.

"Feel in the pockets of your coat," he told the pilot excitedly. "I saw Driscoll shove something into one of them after he had knocked you sprawling out there."

Unbelievably, Chapin searched his pockets. He brought to light a folded piece of the paperlike, inner bark of the white birch. In penciled writing, Herb Hood's name was inscribed across one of its outer folds. Chapin passed it over to the guide.

With the point of his hunting knife, Hood loosened the seal of melted spruce gum that held the edges of the folded bark together. He ran his eye hurriedly down the finely written page and handed it to Elliott.

"Here, Mr. Elliott, you're a smoother reader'n I am. Read it—aloud."

Elliott read:

"HERE: Maybe I'll be alive, maybe I'll be dead when you read this. Makes no difference. Things are working out as I hoped.

"Goan is not fit to live. Walmrac is little better. Here's why I've waited three years to do what I plan to do to-morrow.

"Remember, Herb, when I left this part of the country, I was only a kid. I was crazy over aviation. I learned it from the ground up.

"Met Goan in the city. He wanted a pilot. Offered me big money to do some flying for him. I was a country kid, didn't know what I was getting into. First I knew, Goan had me mixed up in a mail-plane robbery. Then I didn't dare leave him or squeal on him. He had me where he could give me the gun, right.

"I was in love with a girl, Herb. She loved me. She had no idea I was tied up with Tarantula Goan. I lived in the hope of getting out from under Goan's thumb so I could marry her.

"And then Goan saw the girl. He got crazy about her. One of the gang tipped me off. I carried her away and hid her with an old lady I knew, who would care for her.

"Goan got wise to what I'd done. He and some of his gang caught me, tied me up, and tried to make me tell where the girl was hidden. I refused. Goan took a gasoline blowtorch and he made my face what it is.

"They left me for dead. Goan still thinks I'm dead. One of the gang, not quite as hard-boiled as the rest, sneaked back and took me away from there. He took me to my girl. She nursed me back to life.

"She would have married me, Herb, even as I am. But it wouldn't have been right, would it?

"When I was well enough, I came back to the woods. The girl don't know where I went. It's better so, don't you think? It's been hell, but I've been able to stay away from her.

"After I got back to the woods I found out that Bill Cutts was in cahoots with Goan in the smuggling racket. I knew that sooner or later Goan would come up here. I got in with Cutts. Since then I've been waiting for Goan to come.

"To-morrow he's coming—by plane.

"If I live through what I shall attempt to-morrow—and I don't much care whether I do or not—it will be with the knowledge that Tarantula Goan will never again bring as much unhappiness to any one as he did to that dear girl and myself.

"I am done with Cutts. I don't know where I'll go. The woods are big—and clean. I can get a living in them. I'll see very few people. My face won't make many turn their eyes away.

"What would I give to be a kid again! Remember that spring on the Allegash, Herb, old man?"

SMOKE DRISCOLL."

Elliott finished reading, and handed the letter silently back to the guide. Hood put it carefully away in his pocketbook and, kneeling, began to loosen the lashings of the roll of camp duffel.

From the roll the guide took his trail-worn pack sack. Methodically he packed it with blankets, food, and ammunition. He strapped the light trail ax into its sheath beneath the cover flap of the pack. He stood up and swung the pack to his shoulder.

"You two gents set up th' tent an' wait here till I come back," said Herb Hood, very quietly. "I'm goin' to make sure that Bill Cutts and Levacue don't trail up Smoke Driscoll an' shoot him in th' back. Seems like we owe him that much, after what he's done for us. So long!"

CHAPTER XII.

FIFTY-FIFTY.

CRUNCHING through the rapidly forming ice of the Cloud, a canoe drew to the landing below the Cloud River railway station. At the stern paddle was Herb Hood. Leaning over the craft's bow with a heavy pole, and breaking a channel through the ice as they went, hung Smoke Driscoll. Elliott labored at the bow paddle.

Amidship in the craft lay two men—the bearded Bill Cutts and Levacue, the Frenchman.

The hands and feet of Cutts and Levacue were securely bound. One does not purposely upset a canoe when the water is freezing and hands and feet are pinioned—even to escape the punishment of the law.

A landing was made. The bonds of the prisoners' feet were removed and the quintet made its way to the welcome warmth of the stove in the station waiting room.

The station agent looked the prisoners over in wide-eyed wonder. He glanced keenly at Smoke Driscoll, at Elliott. Turning to Herb Hood, he asked:

"Well, it's mighty evident you got your man away from 'em, Herb, but how's it happen you ain't got Smoke, there, tied up like you have the other two?"

"Smoke was never one of 'em," explained the guide. "He was playin' a game of his own."

"Oh, ho!" grinned the station agent. "Mighty glad to hear that! Might have known Smoke was on the level."

Smoke Driscoll said nothing. He was gazing moodily out the window at the forest across the tracks.

The station agent spoke again:

"Don't know as you know it, Herb, but that Walmrac feller came out of the woods nigh onto a week ago. He bought a ticket for the city. Haven't seen him since."

A locomotive whistled in the distance. The agent bolted for his office. "That's Sixteen coming now," he explained. "The train from the city. I've got to report her in."

"How long before there's a train for th' city?" inquired Hood.

"Sixteen crosses Seven next station east of here," the agent told the guide. "Seven'll be along now in thirty-five minutes, if she's on time."

Hood thanked him and turned to Smoke Driscoll.

"Keep an eye on them bozos, will yer, Smoke? I'm going out an' watch th' train come in."

The train from the city rolled to a stop before the station. Elliott, watching from the waiting-room window, saw Hood meet two broad-shouldered men and motion them toward the waiting room.

So Chapin, the aviator, had reached the city safely from Tamerack and delivered his message to Judge Winslow. The arrival of the two officers on his train proved that.

The two officers were swinging up the platform toward the station now, but Hood was waiting by the car steps. Elliott wondered why.

Then, to Elliott's surprise, he saw a girl step down from the train and confront Hood. He saw the guide sweep his smoke-stained old Stetson awkwardly from his head. He saw the girl's lips form an anxious question.

Hood nodded in affirmation. The girl's hand went out to the guide in an impulsive gesture. Hood took her arm and led her toward the door of the ladies' waiting room at the other end of the station. Elliott was puzzled.

Hood shoved his head in at the door. The guide's blue eyes were twinkling with suppressed joviality. "Hey, Smoke!" he called. "Come on out here a minute. Them officers'll look out fer Cutts an' Levacue now. Come on!"

Hood held open the door for Smoke

Driscoll to pass. Catching Elliott's eye, he winked broadly and jerked his head for Elliott to follow. Wonderingly, Elliott went.

Hood grasped Smoke Driscoll's arm and led him down the platform. He halted him, turned him about, backed him up against the door of the ladies' waiting room and looked him square in the eye.

"Smoke," he said, "you've proved yer on th' level. You've done a mighty lot for Mr. Elliott and myself in this deal. We'd like ter do somethin' for you. You believe in a fifty-fifty break, don't yer, Smoke?"

"Why—sure!" admitted Driscoll. "But you men don't owe me a thing. I——"

Hood interrupted Driscoll's speech by reaching past him to lay hold of the latch of the waiting-room door.

"All right, Smoke," he said, almost savagely, "you've admitted that a fifty-fifty break is th' only dope. Now, *keep it in mind!*" The guide suddenly opened the door and pushed Driscoll inside.

Past Hood's shoulder, Elliott saw a girl standing in the middle of the waiting room. Her arms were outstretched toward Smoke Driscoll. As he looked, her lips formed the single, pleading word:

"Smoke!"

Driscoll's great frame seemed to lose its strength. For a moment he leaned weakly against a door jamb. Then, throwing back his lionlike head and squaring his mighty shoulders, he crossed the floor in two long strides and gathered the girl into his embrace as one would a tired child.

"Marcja!" Elliott heard him murmur.

Hood closed the door resolutely and turned to Elliott. The guide's white teeth shone in a smile of content.

Elliott held out a hand. "Herb Hood, you're some fixer, and how! Tell me how you did it."

"Plenty easy, Mr. Elliott. Yer see, Smoke must have told th' girl about me some time. Not long before you came up here she wrote me, asking me did I know where Smoke was, an' could I find him for her. Waal, after we got things straightened out, back there at Tamerack, I wrote her a note an' sent it out by Chapin when he flew th' plane home."

"Jiminy!" exulted Elliott. "That's good work, Herb! Now I am glad I was air sick so I couldn't go back to the city with Chapin in the plane. I wouldn't have missed that reunion for anything!"

IN due course of time, No. 7, the city-bound train, pulled in. The officers herded their two prisoners aboard the train.

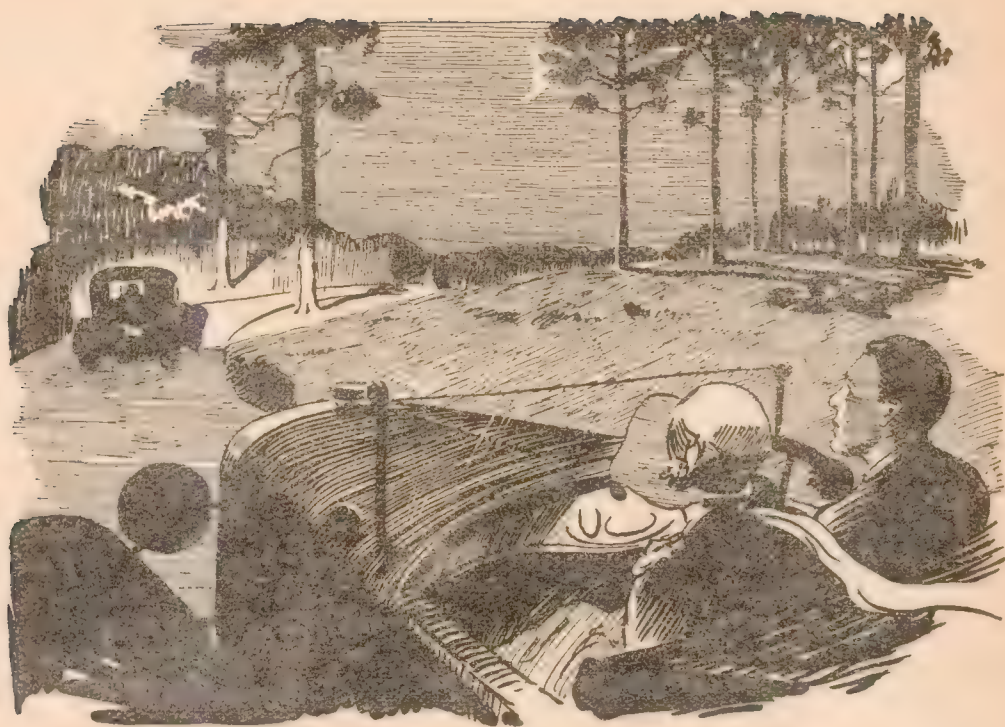
From the car steps, Elliott shook hands with Herb Hood, Smoke Driscoll, and a smiling, starry-eyed girl. Farewells were said. Wishes of good fortune exchanged. Hood extracted a promise from Elliott to come back some time when he could show him the country "right." The train pulled slowly away.

Then, for the first time, Elliott saw Herb Hood's usual composure badly shattered.

It was when, there on the platform, in sight of every one, Smoke Driscoll's girl threw an arm around the guide's neck, pulled his head down, and implanted a thankful kiss on his sun-browned cheek.

"Afraid of neither man, the elements, nor the devil," chuckled James Elliott, as he climbed the car steps, "but as bashful as a school kid! Well, sometimes they come that way."

More stories by Reg Dinsmore will appear in this magazine. How did you like "What Price Justice"? Write to the editors and give your opinion.



Mighty Lak a Rose

A Story of the Syncopatin' Kid

By Vic Whitman

COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

CHAPTER I.

THRUMMING JAZZ.



It was one of the Blue Room's big nights, and the floor was thronged with several hundred couples. Laughing, chatting, they glided and rocked about the dancing space.

Raccoon coats don't care who's wearin' em. Hall-room boys will soon be snarin' 'em—

Usually the "Syncopatin' Kid" grinned out at the crowd as, debonair and immaculate, he sat at the piano car-

rying the Blue Room band along on the swing of his matchless rhythm.

But to-night he wasn't watching the floor. His alert, blue eyes were fixed upon a certain booth in the balcony. The Kid was puzzled and interested.

"Now she's not in this hall because she enjoys bein' here," he reflected, taking a piano break in weird, haunting minors. "Anybody can tell that just to look at her once. Wonder what her idea is?"

He was looking at a little woman who had appeared in the booth about fifteen minutes before. Then the Syn-

copatin' Kid, who saw all things, noticed that she entered hesitantly, timidly, as though unused to such surroundings.

Not that there was anything unusual about her. She was like thousands of other women of middle age, save that perhaps she wasn't so well dressed as most.

But her face was so wan and tired and white—she was so patently out of place amid the seductive crooning of the saxophones, the flat, piercing bark of the trumpets, and the gay chatter that made the Blue Room one of the most popular halls in the South, that the Kid's pity and curiosity were aroused.

He saw her sit down behind a curtain and peer timidly at the dance floor.

"Lookin' for some one and she doesn't want that some one to see her," soliloquized the Kid. "Well! Well!"

Always was the Syncopatin' Kid, pianist extraordinary and prince of the court of jazz, on the lookout for the bizarre or the unusual. Ever since he could remember he had been an adherent of the dance halls.

Capably slim, graceful, attractive, he was possessed of a hard wisdom beyond his years but, too, he had a quick sympathy for things outside his sphere.

It was easy for the Kid to see that the little woman was paying no attention to the music, but the desire seized him—a natural desire for a musician—to attract her attention. Her very appearance told of the type of number that might be familiar to her.

The Kid raised an arm and the booming of "Doin' the Raccoon" stopped at the end of the measure.

"Start 'em on 'Mighty Lak a Rose,' Brad, will you?" he said to Bradley, the apple-cheeked violin lead. "Soft, with lots of feelin'. Right?"

Bradley nodded. Very softly the band crept into the old number, the saxes plaintive and pleading, the violin playing a sweet, high obligato, trum-

pets muted, and piano chiming the chords. In the beautifully blended melody one could almost hear the words floating through the hall:

Sweetest little feller
Everybody knows,
Don't know what to call him,
But he's mighty lak a rose.

The Syncopatin' Kid shot a glance to the balcony booth. Now the little woman was no longer watching the floor. She was gazing down at the band, gazing at them with wide, appealing eyes and white, tired face. So the number did mean something to her. A little grin went over his lips, a grin that faded as he saw her slide quietly out of her chair to the floor.

"Brad!" he called hurriedly. "Here, double on this harp! Be back in a minute."

Bradley put down his violin.

"Sure," he said, "but why the rush?"

He got no answer. The Syncopatin' Kid was already on his way to the balcony. Apparently no one on the floor had seen the incident.

The Kid entered the booth, drew the curtains, and bent over the little form, noticing the worried look that clung to her face even in unconsciousness, the thin hands, the worn spots on the neat clothing.

"Just fainted," muttered the Kid, relieved. "Whew! I didn't know but what she'd passed out for keeps."

There was an old divan in the booth and the Kid lifted her and placed her on it. Then he dashed to a marble drinking fountain, soaked his spotless handkerchief with water, and hurried back to bathe the pale face and temples.

Presently the little woman sighed, and opened her eyes to gaze bewilderedly up into the Kid's concerned face.

"Oh," she said weakly, uncertainly. "I—I don't——"

"Now just take it easy, ma'am," sug-

gested the Kid gently. "You fainted, that's all. Maybe the air in here was a bit too close for you. You're all right, perfectly all right."

The Kid's pleasant voice seemed to reassure her for she closed her eyes and lay back on the divan. When she opened them again she was more composed. Faint color came into her cheeks as she smiled apologetically.

"I'm sorry to have caused you all this trouble," she said, and the Kid noticed the musical quality of her voice. "It was a very foolish thing for me to do."

"You didn't cause me any trouble, ma'am," returned the Kid quickly. "It's tough on you, though. Are you feelin' any better now?"

"Much better, thank you." She sat up on the divan and passed a hand over her face. "I—I think I'll leave now if you wouldn't mind helping me down the stairs."

Lookin' at his mammy
With eyes so shiny blue—

The music was still stealing softly through the hall and she noticed it again. Her lip quivered and she turned her face from the Kid.

"Certainly I'll help you down, ma'am," he answered, then hesitated. Whatever the purpose of her visit to the hall it had evidently not been satisfactory.

Sympathy and not curiosity prompted the Kid's next words: "Now please don't think I'm tryin' to pry into your affairs or anything like that, ma'am. It's just that I saw you when you first came into the balcony and it didn't take more'n three guesses to know that something was wrong. If I could be of any help to you in any way, why—" He stopped, not knowing how to continue.

Anxious eyes turned on him, studying him. "You are not by any chance the one they call the—the Synco—"

"The Syncopatin' Kid?"

"Yes."

"That's me, ma'am. My name is Larry McCall."

"Oh yes, Mr. McCall. I have often heard my son speak of you. Do you know him—John Courtney?"

The Kid pondered and shook his head. "I can't place the name."

"But you must know him by sight," said Mrs. Courtney, pathetically anxious. "He comes here almost every night in the week."

CHAPTER II.

THE HOTTEST BAND.

THE Syncopatin' Kid began to see light. "About how old is he, ma'am?" he inquired.

"He is seventeen but he looks older than that." The worried look had returned to her face.

"And you think he's playin' the dance halls too much?" said the Kid gently.

Mrs. Courtney turned suddenly to this slim, level-eyed young man whose consideration had invited her confidence.

"That's just it!" she cried. "He's all I have and he's coming to these dances night after night. He has a fairly good position, but every cent he makes he spends in the dance halls. But, worse, he's getting in with bad companions. Do you know of a man named Delavan?"

The Kid's face hardened. Charley Delavan, race-track tout and gambler, was a steady patron of the Blue Room. It was whispered about that any one who played cards with him was sure to lose; that any one who associated with him would be watched by the police.

But hitherto these rumors had not concerned the Syncopatin' Kid. The world of the dance hall had the good and the bad. His business was to play for them to dance, not to question their

morals. He had simply not liked Delavan's appearance and let it go at that.

"Yes, I know him," he said.

"Well, I'm afraid that John is going with him. I have never seen the man, but——" She stopped. "Oh, I don't know why I should bother you with all this, Mr. McCall."

Many people confided in the Syncopatin' Kid without knowing why they did it.

"Don't look at it that way, ma'am," he told her quietly. "Just figure that if I can help you in any way, I'm glad to do it. We're not all roughnecks in this dance game, though I've got to admit there's plenty of 'em around. Yes, nobody can blame you for wantin' your son out of here. You can count on my help."

"But how?" demanded the little woman breathlessly. "He won't listen to reason. He is wild about dance halls."

"Sure," conceded the Syncopatin' Kid. "Lots of boys his age are. You can't expect 'em to listen to reason. They've got to be shown. I don't know a thing about your son, so I can't tell just how long it will take to show him. But somehow we'll fix up some way of showin' him."

The Kid's tones were calmly confident.

The little woman's eyes glistened with quick tears. "I don't understand why you should do this for a perfect stranger," she said tremulously.

The Syncopatin' Kid grinned—a strangely wistful little grin.

"Well, ma'am," he said softly, his blue eyes far away, "maybe it's because I never saw my own mother. Maybe it's because I try to give people the breaks as I'd like to have 'em give me the breaks. Who knows? It's a funny life. Anyway, I'm with you."

He helped Mrs. Courtney down over the stairs, and beckoned a doorman.

"Jim, get this lady's refund at the

box office," he directed. "Check it to me." Unobserved by her, he passed a couple of bills to the doorman. "Also get her a taxi with the compliments of the management. Good night, ma'am, and don't worry."

Thus did the Syncopatin' Kid, genius of jazz and wise with the hard wisdom of the dance halls, take upon his slimly capable shoulders a mother's worries.

"Can you tie that one?" the Kid mused as he made his way back to the band platform. "The dance business is my racket, yet I'm pledged to drive away a customer. I'll tell the world that's a new one! And believe you me, I'm either goin' to drive that kid out of this hall or shoot him!"

Briefly he made explanation of his absence to Bradley. Then: "Happen to know a kid by the name of John Courtney, Brad?" he asked.

The leader nodded. "Yeah. Why?"

"Point him out to me, will you?"

Bradley looked the hall over.

"Can't seem to see him anywhere now," he said. "He was here an hour ago, though. If he comes in I'll point him out to you."

"Doesn't especially matter," said the Kid carelessly. He glanced through his folio. "Time they woke up a little out on that floor," he commented. "Let's play this number hot, Brad."

LAUGHING, joking, carelessly swept through life on a current of hot music—that was the Syncopatin' Kid.

Slim and graceful he sat at the piano, one leg crossed nonchalantly over the other. A born artist his playing showed no effort, but he could make a piano talk in any language. No one, save the stone deaf, could sit still while the Kid's nimble fingers were running over the keys.

The Kid was smiling as he played and the smile was all for Stella Plaining, daughter of Warren Plaining, dance-hall magnate. Girls could come

and girls could go, but there was only one Stella. Stunning in her beauty, warmly alive, with a laughing little red bow of a mouth, and light hair that waved and crisped and glinted, she had held the Syncopatin' Kid since he had first seen her.

There was an understanding between them, but that understanding had been established by quick repartee, jokes, and sparring pleasantries, rather than by direct word. The Kid had always felt that Stella rated something better than a dance-hall drifter.

What Stella thought—well, it was hard to be sure. It was hard to be sure of anything in the dance environment. Life was syncopated there, and syncopation has so very many breaks and changes of key.

Suddenly the music softened while the Kid leaned from the piano and sang, sang to Stella Plaining as was his custom:

"Two by two they go marching through
The sweethearts on parade——"

And, in accordance with the understanding, Stella looked up at him and smiled as she danced past the platform, smiled and blew him a swift kiss. Clear and appealing his voice carried the melody. What he would not say in words, the Syncopatin' Kid was saying with song.

"I'd like to join their fun,
But they bar me.
For it takes more than one
To join their army——"

The Kid's voice trailed away on the last note. With a rush the band swept into the interlude, caught it up and tossed it from shrilling soprano saxes to blaring trombone with a muted trumpet knifing into a dirt chorus.

No doubt that here was one of the hottest bands in the country. The drummer bent over his instruments,

teeth showing in a joyous grin, stick hissing from his cymbal in tempo with the twanging odd-beat of the banjo. The alto and tenor sax players, hunching their shoulders in unison, provided a liquid undercurrent of harmony.

The trombone took up the air where the trumpet had left it and blared its brassy way for four measures. Bradley stood up in front, teetering gently on his toes and wielding his bow as a baton. The Syncopatin' Kid, swaying at the piano, provided the unshakable foundation for the structure of jazz.

Small wonder that Warren Plaining, kindly owner of the hall, smiled admiringly as he stood in the door of his office and watched the Syncopatin' Kid.

Small wonder that Stella Plaining's gaze often sought the platform, and became pensive when the Kid wasn't looking at her. Small wonder that the crowd whistled and stamped its appreciation when the number was finished.

But the Kid shook his head in response to the demands for an encore. Not enough is better than too much, was his maxim and he adhered to it. He turned from the piano as Bradley touched his shoulder.

"There's young Courtney now, Larry," said the leader. "See, the dark-haired kid in the blue suit just coming in with Delavan and Molly Verdi."

The Kid looked and saw a stocky, good-looking youngster whose age, at first glance, would seem to be twenty. A good reader of character, the Kid knew instantly that this boy was one who could be handled by deft companions. His brown eyes were like his mother's in that they held the same hint of appeal, and his mouth was not quite so firm as it should be. Still, his jaw was strong and he carried his head well.

"Might be stubborn when he makes up his mind to a thing," the Kid reflected. "Fair enough."

CHAPTER III.

MATCHING WITS.

THE Kid glanced at the boy's companions. Charley Delavan was tall and pallid, with an overheartly laugh and sly eyes. Molly Verdi was lissom, dark and fascinating in her way.

Usually she was silent, thoughtful, but she could flower instantly into radiant gayety. Her smile—when she smiled—was dazzling, but always her black eyes remained hard, inscrutable. She was smiling now as she looked up at young Courtney.

"Humph," muttered the Syncopatin' Kid, noting the look Courtney gave her in return. "I can see where this is goin' to be one tough job."

He went to the edge of the platform and called quietly to Stella Plaining who stood chatting with a group of young people. She heard, excused herself, and came to him.

"Angel," she greeted lightly.

The Kid grinned and shook his head in wonder. "What a little knock-out you are in that outfit!" he told her. "Honest, you make me dizzy."

"Imagine! I didn't think anything could make you dizzy."

"You don't know the half of it," sighed the Syncopatin' Kid. "What you do to me is nobody's business."

"Why, how thrilling!"

"I'll say it's thrilling." He dropped his air of half-light, half-serious badinage. "By the way, Stel, got a date after the dance?"

Her blue eyes danced. "Interested?" she asked.

"You bet your life I'm interested."

"That's a help." She saw something in his face that changed her mood. "No, of course I haven't, Larry."

"I just wondered if you'd want to take a little ride afterward. You see, Stel, it's this way." Briefly he told her of the episode with Mrs. Courtney.

Immediately Stella became sympa-

thetic. "The poor dear!" she exclaimed. "Of course I'll do anything I can."

She caught her red underlip between shining little teeth. "Do you suppose it would do any good to have daddy refuse him admission to the hall?" she asked.

The Kid shook his head. "He couldn't very well do that unless young Courtney gave him some excuse," he replied. "Besides, if he was barred here he'd only go to another hall. The main thing is we've got to break him away from Molly Verdi and Delavan."

Stella looked at Molly Verdi in the way one woman sometimes looks at another.

"She's impossible," Stella declared. "I wish she'd keep away from this hall. But what is she playing around with that boy for? He's lots younger than she is, and she never would have anything to do with a man unless he had loads of money."

"That's just it," said the Kid slowly. "She must have some reason, and it's a cinch she's not in love with him."

"And that he's crazy over her," added Stella.

"You know it. And what's Delavan's idea?" He stopped as an idea occurred to him. "Maybe he's usin' him for bait," he muttered.

"What do you mean by that?" asked Stella curiously.

"I don't know exactly, Stel. Anyway, we'll see what we'll see."

IT was time to be playing again. As if he had nothing on his mind, the Syncopatin' Kid sauntered back to the piano. Graceful, immaculate, he swung the band into a popular number, setting the tempo for that ceaseless scuffling of shoes out on the floor. All kinds met here, the good and the bad, to laugh and dance and pass the time away following the lure of the great god Jazz.

I can't give you anything but love, baby—

With the good-night number over the Kid arose, nodded genially to his musicians, and hastened to the main exit. Stella was waiting for him, and they pushed into the crowd that was edging its way out.

The Kid saw Delavan, Molly, and young Courtney get into Delavan's car. Promptly, he put Stella Plain into the roadster he had recently bought, and got in behind the wheel.

"Where to, Larry?" she asked, snuggling down beside him.

The Kid let in his clutch as Delavan's car shot away from the curb.

"Wherever they go, Stel," he answered. "I want to find out a thing or two. We may not get in very early, though. Will your father worry?"

"Why should he?" said Stella. "He knows I'm with you."

The Kid grinned. "How does he know we're not goin' to elope?"

"He doesn't."

"How do *you* know?"

"I don't," said Stella serenely, gazing up at a three-quarters moon.

Just a game, of course, but the Kid's pulses went faster.

"Then you wouldn't mind if we did?"

Stella turned bright eyes full upon him. Red lips curved deliciously, a little uncertainly.

"Imagine the thrill of eloping with the famous Syncopatin' Kid," she observed. "I'd love to, except for one thing."

"What's that?"

"The number of other girls who would die of heartbreak. I'd feel like a murderer."

Dally and thrust and spar, with understanding clear, below the matching of wits.

The Kid laughed and reddened. "Time out," he pleaded. "That one's too fast for me."

They had cleared the city now and were out on a boulevard. Ahead, Dela-

van's car was going rapidly. The Kid reached down and switched off his lights.

"Moonlight's bright enough to drive by," he said. "I don't want that bird to get the idea anybody's followin' him."

A mile or so out, and Delavan swung into a driveway. The Kid knew the place. It was the Iron Inn, a road house of racy reputation. He stopped his car.

"I don't want to take you in there, Stel," he said doubtfully.

She moved closer to him.

"Nice boy," she murmured, "but I think we will go in just the same. You want to see what they're doing, and I'm curious to see what the place looks like inside." Seeing that he still hesitated, she added quickly, "It's all right, Larry, since I'm with you. Please!"

"Well——" Slowly the Kid swung into the driveway.

The manager knew him.

"Hello, Kid," he greeted. "Decided to come out here and work for me?"

The Kid laughed.

"Maybe some day, Fred," he returned. "Right now I've got all I can tend to. Got a table for us in here?"

"Sure." The manager led the way to the big café. "There's several empty. Take your pick."

A head waiter approached. The Kid saw Delavan, Molly Verdi, and John Courtney sitting at a table in the corner. The table next to theirs was vacant.

"That one'll do," directed the Kid.

People looked at them as they made their way to the table. Men stared at the silken-haired, lovely Stella Plain; women appraised the slim, nonchalant Syncopatin' Kid with equal admiration. A few knew the Kid personally; nearly every one knew him by sight and reputation.

Seated, the Kid glanced casually over at Delavan and his party. Delavan

nodded curtly, and the Kid smiled pleasantly. Then he lighted a cigarette and turned his attention to what was going on around him.

Acts were just starting. None of them was particularly lively and Delavan and Molly Verdi commented sneeringly and audibly on them. The Kid said nothing.

Across the room a man was just coming in. He was around fifty, the Kid judged, and a person of importance despite the fact that he was somewhat in his cups. Delavan spoke low-voiced to young Courtney. The boy looked and nodded, and presently went across the room to the newcomer's table.

CHAPTER IV.

THE BAITING.

THE Kid watched closely without seeming to be interested. There was no doubt that John Courtney was attractive. The way he carried himself bespoke his breeding. He was talking to the man and in a moment both came back to Delavan's table. Delavan was almost overcordial in acknowledging the introduction, and Molly Verdi suddenly became gracious.

The Kid's eyes narrowed. In a second, the thing became clear to him.

"Bait," he thought. "Courtney has met a few rich birds in whatever business he's in. He ropes 'em in at places like this and Delavan fleeces 'em. When Courtney don't know 'em, Molly does her stuff. Lovely!"

Glasses were on the table and Delavan poured into them from a flask. Already young Courtney's eyes had an unnatural brightness and his face was flushed.

The Kid frowned, thinking of the little woman who waited anxiously at home. The waiter arrived with ginger ale and glasses. The Kid poured a little ginger ale over the cracked ice, then took a paper from his pocket and deftly

emptied the powder into his glass. Stella watched curiously as the powder melted into the amber of the ginger ale.

"What's the idea, Larry?" she wanted to know.

"You'll see in a minute, honey." The orchestra swung into a dance number, and the Kid rose. "It's a long time since we had a dance together, Stel. Let's step."

In passing Delavan's table, he contrived to stumble awkwardly and knock young Courtney's glass to the floor. As he apologized, the boy looked up, angrily at first, then voluble as he recognized the Syncopatin' Kid.

"S'all right, Mr. McCall," Courtney said a trifle thickly. "Anything you do's all right."

"That's fine, John." He stepped back to his own table and picked up his glass. "Here, take this. I haven't touched it yet. That's just ginger ale in there."

As the Kid glided about the floor with Stella, he saw Delavan pour into the glass; saw John Courtney raise the glass and drink.

A few minutes later Courtney became deathly pale. "Guess I better go home," he mumbled uncertainly.

Delavan was plainly unwilling to leave his quarry. "Sit still, John," he grumbled. "It'll pass in a minute."

"No, I—I better go home."

The Syncopatin' Kid nodded to Stella and they rose. The Kid approached Delavan.

"We're leavin' now and we can drive him home as well as not," he offered.

Delavan glanced suspiciously up, but the Kid's face was guileless.

"That's nice of you," put in Molly Verdi, flashing her smile on the Kid. "We really would like to stay a while longer."

"I thought so," murmured the Kid.

With the manager's help, he got young Courtney into the rumble seat of his car. He adjusted the boy in a

comfortable position, and got in behind the wheel.

"It's a shame!" declared Stella indignantly. "Giving a boy like that liquor. I don't see why people like to drink it, anyway."

"Rotten stuff," agreed the Kid. "Never did anybody any good. But you can bet your life, Stel, that it'll be a long time before this boy will touch any more."

"Why?"

"That powder is what's makin' him so sick. It's tough treatment, but the best. Even the smell of booze is goin' to make him sick when he gets over this. It's handy stuff to have, and I always carry a couple of papers of it."

"You're not going to take him home that way?"

"I'll say not. Leave it to me, Stel."

She patted his hand. "You're a dear, Larry, if you only knew it."

"Thanks," said the Kid. "You're more'n that if you only knew it."

THE Kid left Stella at her home.

When he took John Courtney home two hours later, the boy was pale and shaky, but he was feeling better. Cold showers and towel applications of ice had done their work. But the Kid hadn't said a word to Courtney about his companions.

He went back to his room, slept till early afternoon, then went to see Mrs. Courtney. Going up the steps he heard a voice singing tenderly:

"Sweetest little feller
Everybody knows,
Don't know what to call him,
But he's mighty lak a rose."

The Kid took the liberty of glancing through the window. Mrs. Courtney was sitting before a small fireplace, darning socks, and singing to herself as she rocked back and forth. It was a scene appealing in its domesticity, and enhanced by the singing. It gripped the Kid.

Mrs. Courtney was glad to see him. "Do come right in," she said. "I was wondering when you would come, Mr. McCall."

"I always try to get things done as quickly as I can," smiled the Kid. He entered and took the chair she indicated.

"I just heard you singin' a second ago, ma'am," he went on. "That's one of my favorite numbers."

The little woman smiled, pleased.

"Mine, too," she confessed. "I sang it to John when he was a baby and I've been singing it ever since. He must be very tired of it by now."

"Impossible, ma'am," said the Syncopatin' Kid gallantly.

His agile brain was busy considering her words. Then in a flash the thing came to him.

"I dropped around to tell you that I met your son last night," he said. "Now when any one has banged around as much as I have, he gets to read human nature pretty well. There's good stuff in John, Mrs. Courtney, and we've got to hit right at it. Now listen." Briefly, earnestly, he outlined his plan.

Mrs. Courtney's eyes opened wide with astonishment. "Why, I—I could never do that," she faltered.

"Sure you can," said the Syncopatin' Kid. "You can do anything you think you can."

"But——" She hesitated.

"It's for John you're doin' it," reminded the Kid gently.

That settled matters, as the Kid knew it would.

The little woman sat up in her chair.

"Very well," she said. "I will."

And so it was that the Blue Room ads for a night of the following week carried this:

SOMETHING DIFFERENT.

That was all—no elaboration, no suggestion of what the something was to be.

But the Blue Room followers were accustomed to ads like that. They wondered and talked and spread the news. Whatever it was, it would be good. The Syncopatin' Kid would make sure of that. They knew it. Hadn't he proved it dozens of times before?

The Kid attended to all the details personally, especially the stage settings. Those would be of first importance. Everything had to be placed in a certain position, and none other would do. The lighting effects must be perfect. The Kid tried out a dozen before he found one to suit him.

On the day of the performance, he made it a point to meet Molly Verdi on the street.

"Hello, Molly," he greeted. "Goin' to drop in on us to-night?"

Her inscrutable black eyes regarded him.

"I don't know," she answered. "Maybe. I see you've got a special act on."

The Kid hid his grin by lighting a cigarette. "Special is right," he answered. "I had you and Charley in mind when I arranged for it, too."

"You did!" A bit more animation showed in Molly's face. "Are you kidding?"

"Kidding? Don't be like that, Molly. It's quite a stunt, too. I know you'll both enjoy it."

"Tell me about it."

The Kid grinned openly this time. "The curtain will ring up on it about eleven, Molly. See you later."

That night a capacity crowd was on hand. As he sat at the piano leading the team through "Anything You Say" the Syncopatin' Kid took stock of the hall. Yes, there must be nearly a thousand people in—balcony booths were filled, too.

Down on the floor, Molly Verdi and young Courtney were dancing. Courtney looked up and grinned as he passed

the band platform. A nice kid in with a bad bunch.

Charley Delavan was dancing with a girl the Kid didn't know. Stella Plaining was not on the floor, but the Kid knew she was out in one of the dressing rooms.

CHAPTER V.

SWEET MELODY.

THE world of the dance hall with its gay, frivolous chatter, with its mingled odors of perfume, dust, and trailing cigarette smoke—a world of crashing rhythm with the steady boom of the bass drum pounding in ears long after the music had ceased—a world of laughing, serious, melancholy faces, ever changing, ever restless. Colorful, picturesque, stimulating, it was the modern world in all its completeness, the world of the slim, debonair youth who grinned at the dancers as he played.

"If you said go and get the moon,
I'd go right up and get the moon.
That's how I feel about you, sweetheart."

The Kid sang the tune, and the triteness of the words were lost in the haunting quality of his voice. Perhaps he was born for this—to bring a moment's respite from the daily duties into the lives of people. If so he was serving his purpose and serving it well.

"Step on it, gang! Fly sax, soprano! Get hot! Oh! Oh! Oh!"

The music was getting wilder and wilder as the Kid spurred his men on. He wanted it to be that way, because what was coming would stand out more clearly by way of contrast, like a golden sunset sharply etched against the black of storm clouds. He yelled at the brass section and they flared upward into a sustained note, kettle drums booming like steady thunder, clarinet flashing jaggedly through the thunder.

"Get hot!"

Wilder and louder grew the music,

with the Syncopatin' Kid working like a demon at the piano. The combined clash of harmony was irresistible; it almost tore the roof off. The dancers rocked and shuddered and shouted under its spell.

Then suddenly it died away. The Kid rose from the piano, grinned, and held up his hand against the roar of applause. When the hall quieted he spoke briefly, "Here's the something different."

The curtain fell and the musicians left the platform, taking their instruments with them. Bradley and the two sax players helped the Kid roll the piano into the wings, by a hole in the upright through which he could look out into the hall. Competent stage hands rushed to place furniture.

AGAIN the curtain went up. This time the scene was a living room with a small fireplace, a wicker chair or two, an old couch, a worn carpet. And before the fireplace in the living room, which was an exact replica of her own, sat a little woman darning socks and rocking slowly back and forth.

A chord came softly from the piano in the wings. With it arose the little woman's voice, tremulous at first, then gaining strength:

"Sweetest little feller
Everybody knows,
Don't know what to call him,
But he's mighty lak a rose."

Her voice was not powerful, not cultivated, not rich in the sense of musical richness. But it had qualities that far offset these. It was vibrant with sacrifice, with appeal, with the simple things in life that tug at the heart-strings.

"Lookin' at his mammy
With eyes so shiny blue——"

That was all there was to it—just a little woman singing an old song as she

darned socks. But in some unaccountable way the little scene denoted loneliness and pathos.

It was as though an invisible line held singer and audience in the same bond, as though it were one of those things that can be felt but not explained. Here was no professional singer. Here was the utmost in simplicity and sincerity.

The Syncopatin' Kid, accompanying very softly, glanced up at Stella Plaining who stood by his side, one hand on his shoulder. Her eyes were misty.

"It's beautiful, Larry," she breathed, and the Kid barely caught the words.

He glanced out to where a boy in a blue suit was standing rigidly. The boy's eyes were wide open, staring, and his mouth was working. The Kid didn't have to be told what was going through his mind. It was the boy's own mother singing in her own living room, singing the song he had so often heard her sing. Because it had become so familiar to him he had thought little about it.

But now that the scene had been transplanted to a public dance hall before hundreds of eyes, it became something that young Courtney had unconsciously cherished as sacred.

Now he realized it for the first time. It was the heart of life being bared to curious onlookers. It was sacrilege to have his mother here in this place singing the song she had sung to him ever since he was born, and the shock was great.

"But he's mighty lak a rose."

The Kid glanced at Molly Verdi and Delavan who were with Courtney. They were almost certain to comment on an act that didn't appeal to them, and if——

Yes, Molly's lips were curling scornfully. She said something to Delavan. The Kid could guess the gist of it.

"Where does the Syncopatin' Kid

get off to pull that stuff? Terrible! She ought to be in the Salvation Army. Get the hook!"

Delavan answered, "Yeah, get the hook! That's the rottenest act I ever saw. Where'd they dig up that old bim? Rotten!"

The Syncopatin' Kid didn't need to hear the words. He saw young Courtney's chest heave, saw him give Molly Verdi one long, level look, saw him yank Delavan to his feet and smash him full in the face, saw him hurry to the platform as the curtain went down to great applause.

Then the Kid heard Courtney say to his mother in a voice that was harsh with grief, "Aw, gee, what's the idea of doing that here?"

A flitting little smile went over the mother's lips. Inwardly rejoicing at the victory, she said very quietly, "I'm ready to go home now, son."

The boy looked around him, and saw the Syncopatin' Kid leaning easily on the piano. Fury blazed in his eyes and he strode to the Kid.

"I'd ought to kill you for this!" he choked, fists clenched. "And I thought you were a friend of mine!" Hardly knowing what he was doing he started a wild swing, but several musicians interposed.

The Kid hadn't changed his posture. "You'd better go," was all he said.

He sighed as he watched them go down the platform steps, then slowly he lighted a cigarette. Of course the boy wouldn't understand, and of course the mother wouldn't explain.

Explanation would lessen the boy's grief and if the lesson were to be lasting the grief must be deep. Perhaps for the rest of his life young Courtney would hold this against the Syncopatin' Kid, but that didn't matter. There was only one thing that counted, and that one thing had been achieved.

"My mother would have been like that," thought the Kid wistfully, "and I guess if she's lookin' at me now, she'd be glad I did this."

Already the band was moving its instruments back on the platform. Already the stage hands had cleared the furniture. Yes, the dance must go on after its interruption; it was ceaseless, unending. Yet now the environment seemed cleaner, as though a sweet, fresh breeze had swept the hall.

The curtain went up as the band slurred softly into a chorus. Debonair, immaculate, grinning, the Syncopatin' Kid roamed the keys. But there was a strange new tenderness in his voice as he sang down to a starry-eyed girl on the floor:

"I'll get by, just as long as I have you——"

Another Syncopatin' Kid story,

by VIC WHITMAN,

will appear in our next issue.



Hallet, the Lucky

By Laurence J. Cahill

COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

CHAPTER I.

SOMEBODY ALWAYS DIES.



N all Addis Ababa, which is the fair-sized capital of Abyssinia, only one grog shop sells a certain famous Milwaukee brew, and there Dudley Hallet was, on this particular day.

Hallet whispered to his glass. "Mustn't pass up this chance. I can sample you in only three stations between here and Algiers."

Such peculiar knowledge was his that he could find his way blindfolded down the streets of half the cities of the world, and would himself be found where commodities were rare and hard to get—and these commodities might be

Milwaukee "best," gold that was white as platinum, ambergris, carpets from Bagdad, diamonds——

They called Hallet, "The Lucky." In his brown hand, as he leaned over his glass in that saloon at the end of Menelik Street in Addis Ababa, he rolled a little pellet of black dirt—a diamond dark as coal.

A disturbance in the street attracted his attention. He turned and saw—through the shutter-lifted front of the shop—a curious spectacle.

A great, startling figure of a white man with flaming red hair, was swagging through the jumbled traffic of Abyssinia's most crowded thoroughfare. This red-headed one was smiling—a smile infamous and hated from

Baikal, Siberia, to Tacna under the Andes—and all about him were screams of pain and yells of rage.

He was strangely brutal as he walked. With his great arm he knocked lepers kicking from his path. He broke the staves of crippled beggars, lifted shrieking children aside by their scraggly woolly hair, and trampled cur dogs underfoot.

Hallet's upper lip curled with contempt as he watched this exhibition. "Some day," he whispered to the sultry air, "for all the suffering that red fiend's caused, there'll be a reckoning." Then he turned, did Hallet the American, and finished his glass.

The red-headed giant was walking lumberously and disdainfully toward the grog shop when his careless, piglike eyes fell upon Hallet. And the owner of the piglike eyes stood stock-still that moment, as if he saw the one man that for him made the world all too overcrowded.

The American's back was turned, but that did not prevent the great red-headed one from knowing that what he saw was The Lucky—it was Hallet, all right, neat as a bandbox, calm as an idle breeze, from his smoothly tanned jaws to his mirror-polished military boots. He was thoroughly studied by the one who stood in the street and stared at him.

He of the flaming red hair then opened his linen coat, removed from a pocket under the armpit a polished bit of yellow—and stuck it in his mouth. Looking stiff and hard at the inch crease of the American's neck between his immaculate collar and his hair, he leaned in the windowless front of the shop—carefully lowering his dingy helmet under the edge of the curling shutter—and pointed the odd yellow thing as an amateur holds a cigar.

An uneasy shrug of the American's back and shoulders was immediately followed by his turning mechanically

on his heel and aiming a very large and black revolver at the bull's-eye presented by the dirty shirt front of the man in the street.

"How-de-do, Brock," whispered Hallet unexcitedly. "Where's that blowpipe that was in your mouth?"

The other had dropped it deftly into his hand and was pocketing it. He held his answer for a moment while he observed Hallet with every trace of passion and purpose wiped out of his face.

The American was smaller, being scarcely six feet—better built for light, spare comfort—but his attitude was one of much familiarity and patience with such situations.

"Come on," he prodded.

"Oh!" the red-headed one ejaculated, his broad Copenhagen-Dutch features as still as putty. "You know dot little Dak smoke pipe what they use up in the Irrawaddy?"

"Yes. Throw it in on the floor, Brock."

The other demurred with that awkward, dumb misunderstanding that some people employ when they want to get out of a scrape.

"Come on," snapped Hallet. "Heave that thing where I can lean my heel on it." His voice held command, and yet it never rose beyond that odd whisper that had been heard in every quarter of the globe—always in command, and always quiet. "'Nother second, and you'd have blown that dart in my neck."

"Yes, you are The Lucky," said Brock, soberly. "You have that third ear, which tells you when somethin' unpleasant is near. It is so."

"Never mind. Get rid of that."

Brock, powerful and rugged as a bear, blocked the door and surveyed the advantage taken by Hallet. He was still of face, but he took the assassin's pipe from his pocket and tossed it before him on the floor.

The intended victim strode forward and burst the thin reed under his shoe, and ground the frail dart into the dust.

"Right, take no chances, Hallet," counseled the other, quaintly, swinging his great hands like dead weights at his sides.

A twisted smile flitted on "Lucky" Hallet's face. He spoke almost tenderly on the subject. "Competition in our business is hard eh—enemy? You've tried three times to kill me—once in Coolgardie, at least once in that storm going through the Great Barrier Reef to Papua, and now here."

"So you didn't guess there was a fourth time," hinted Brock, very brazenly.

Hallet's voice never rose above a whisper. "At murder you'd be much more clever—you're more used to it. But I'll take my chances with the plain variety, now. Anything in this country can be blamed on the heat. Stand still."

Brock, who never had any nerves, began to sweat ever so slightly. For Hallet, so easy of nature that he would usually condone trickery and treachery if he saw he could win handily over both, was squeezing the notoriously quick-trigger of his Colt.

HALLET! hailed a fresh Colorado twang in the street beyond the door of the shop.

Dudley Hallet stared past his most persistent rival and enemy, and took his time making the decision. He lowered his gun, motioned Brock to step out—replaced his weapon in its holster and walked into the street himself.

"H'lo, Irving," he muttered.

The son of the American consul sat gayly in the family Ford, which was surrounded by superstitious Abyssinians who stood back where the "eyes" of the machine couldn't look at them.

"Say, I heard you were down here,

Hallet," shouted the young man. "You know, there's another guy looking—gee, that's him, I guess. You Brock? Hey, the both of you are after that carbon pocket the Coptic monks talk about. Ain't you? Gee, competition! Say, what is this *carbon*, anyway?"

Hallet smiled. "Diamonds. Black diamonds, in demand for the drill heads of machinery all over the world."

The youngster stared. "There's hard luck goin' after diamonds. Ever hear tell? That's what the prospectors say to my father. Somebody always dies."

Brock squinted across his great Dutch width of cheek bone at the American.

Lucky Hallet looked at the soft gumbo of the road and smiled again. "Yes. That's right, Irving. Those yarns always hang on something. Diamonds may be bad luck."

"Well—I hope not, for you guys. Yes, sir, I'd go with you if you were huntin' gold or something. But not this kinda game. Jump in, and I'll drive you down to the consulate or wherever you're goin'."

The American prospector and adventurer got into the car with the smile still traced upon his browned, alert features. Brock jumped in beside him, with the astounding ease of a great cat, and sprawled out, with his gigantic boots through the swinging door. He suddenly laughed heartily and clapped Hallet on the back without explanation.

The consul's boy turned about and said, "I haven't shaken hands with you, Mr. Brock. Put 'er there."

The Dutchman stopped his guffaws quickly, looked at the kid, and pushed forward his stupendous five fingers. It was a strangely dazed and impressed youth when that dark paw wrapped like leaves of iron around his own hand—pressed lightly, like the mere touch of death—and withdrew.

Brock burst into another gale of odd

Dutch chuckling—vast, harsh laughter. The man beside him looked, with a smile, on the road ahead—the heel of his right hand resting on the smooth butt of his revolver.

CHAPTER II.

TRAIL OF DEATH.

IT was Hallet's smile and Brock's quaking laugh that gave the capital city of Addis Ababa the strange, nervous air of a practical, grisly joke about to be sprung.

Hallet smiled frequently at the attempts of the Dutchman to organize an expedition for the dash south. The red one's difficulties were huge, for the fame of the man was like a forewarning miasma that said "beware!" The blacks' fear of him was greater than their greed for gold.

Brock laughed reassuringly, wheedled, coaxed, threatened, bought prodigiously right and left, and finally took the head of a column in the trail running down into the Gurage Province.

But the way ahead was already marked by a well-defined spoor. Lucky Hallet was three days ahead of him.

A lone white man heading an expedition, with neither friend nor acquaintance of his own kind to talk to, has plenty to think about. Hallet looked back, innumerable times, and wondered how long it would take the Dutchman to catch up with him. He knew that the red-headed one would save nothing to cut down the distance between them, and that man and beast must suffer for the effort.

Hallet slowly grew angry, and this resentment, typical of him, took root and grew from day to day. There was nothing in his experience so needless as suffering—nothing so terrible and so foolish as the torturing of beasts of burden, whether they be men or mounts. He knew; for no man could say that he had knocked against the

Dutchman for half a dozen years without knowing.

"Those poor black devils—those poor, poor devils!" he whispered.

And soon arrived the day when, turning in his saddle, Hallet saw the bowed backs and hanging heads of the column behind. Brock was flogging his way to the front.

When the distance between them was shortened to a matter of a few thousand yards, communication was tested.

Hello, Hallet. Push up your gun toters. I'm having a hard time holding these Gurage blacks of mine in good order. They want to pick on your Gallas. You're going through enemy country, you know. Better pull over and let me through.

One of Brock's sweat-dripping runners delivered this letter to Hallet, and returned with as accurate an account of the forward caravan as his poor English and memory would serve. He handed in a reply.

Hallet threw back the defy:

Keep back. My *sabanias* are shooting straight. It's bullets for any man walking into our lines.

Apparently Brock took into consideration the fact that they were now far enough from the city to fight it out in desultory or abrupt action, without central or consular interference. He sent snipers ahead to pick off stragglers in the leading caravan. It was a policy of harassment.

Dudley Hallet ignored this order for a while, letting reprisals take their toll as they could. Then he rode back himself, flung out in the grass with an expensively cased Winchester rifle, and systematically picked off five of the advance train of Brock's caravan.

A maddening leonine roar from the heart of the confusion, without doubt, came from Brock himself. But the order of the day stopped and was taken over by silence.

Hello, Hallet. What's all the hell about? You or somebody has shot up the best of my boys. I know my Gurage blacks started it. But you ain't got no call to go shooting yourself. Any more, and I'll come into your camp myself and you can guess what'll happen.

Hallet smiled but worked over no reply. They were cutting through swimming hot country and no effort outside actual fighting was worth the card.

Large flocks of kites began to stream out behind Brock's train. These Hallet could see even with the naked eye as he looked down from his ascent into rolling foothills. With the aid of strong glasses he could tell that Brock's brutalities were at the pitch of their frenzy.

The glasses told no faltering story. Dead men and hamstringed mules stretched out behind the red one's struggle up that lush, fever-hung valley. The carrion flocks tailed the unit like a cloud and ate a progressive feast.

With his anger rising like fire in his veins, Hallet sent back a note meant to jar the Dutchman to his senses.

Five of your boys skulked into my camp between midnight and morning. They say you are the devil himself devouring all the life in his hands. I know you well enough when you're typical—but are you going insane?

The letter was returned to Hallet, uniformly changed in color—crimson drenched. It was not brought back by its original bearer.

BUT desertions from Brock's train ceased—or no more appeared on the sleek flanks of the American's outfit, asking for succor. They were turning into the southwest, entering Kaffir Land in the general direction of the Uganda border. The line of expedition was climbing more steeply into the trackless virgin uplands. The American was better able to look back

through Zeiss glasses at the sickly, tattered caravan below.

So this was a race for diamonds. Hallet wearily recalled to himself that hardships and misfortunes always followed diamonds.

Well, as for hardships, the red one had succeeded only in brutalizing himself, and, to look at his outfit, the grind at this part of the march was visibly being felt.

The country was becoming desolate. Gone were the cedar forests, the sweet dank meadows and even the giant heather that mats the foothills of Ethiopian highlands. Red-basalt gorges rose under their feet. Gone was the running game—the zebras, the koodoos, the splashing waterbuck, the oryx, the antelope and gazelle.

Vultures still wheeled in the sky above their line. On the crags over their heads balanced and paused the rare nyala—the much-sought mountain buck of Kaffir Land. They were in the kingdom of the chieftain, Ras Haf-fa, and could expect to be challenged by a party of his brigands at any hour.

The caravan toiled along less than a mile apart, and presumably a state of brittle-armed truce prevailed. The American was prudent enough to keep trained riflemen ever watching on the tail of his outfit.

One of these gun carriers burst breathlessly upon Hallet with the word that he was needed immediately. The American rode back to meet the great red-headed one, who was leaning wearily on the last mule in Hallet's train and being fanned by two tireless, nervous slaves.

"Say, Hallet. H'are yuh? Have you got any quinine? I haven't sweat for a day and a half. Keep that fan moving, damn you." Brock smashed one of his luckless blacks in the mouth with his horny hand.

Hallet set his jaws and waited.

Brock was a curious spectacle. He

looked completely all done, but his extremities were the strangest sights in miles. His hands were black with dried dirt. The linen pants he wore that were formerly white, were rolled to his knees—and his feet were bare. His feet—those clublike appendages—were as his hands, but even more arresting. Monstrous hands and feet—with traces of dead men on them.

"You brute, Brock," Hallet whispered in his calm, quiet voice. "What am I going to do with the men you mutilated and sent running into my camp. Especially, say, the one with his hands cut off?"

The other didn't answer, but swayed in a sullen stupor.

"You ought to be killed—by that man with no hands. You've done things like that in every frontier of the world. You ought to die—soon. Think you deserve sympathy for being sick?"

Hallet looked closely at the Dutchman. There was no doubt that he was sick. The signs of fever along the east coast are unmistakable. Hallet billeted the Dutchman out of disgust, contempt, and a small part of sympathy.

The American entered into a long discussion with the headman of his caravan. Precautions were considered and weighed, for the situation was acute. Hallet took three of his riflemen with him and cantered down the long line of Brock's miserably straggling expedition.

He came back cursing. "This beast ought to die! He can't live forever! I've seen plenty—but nothing like that."

Because he was schooled in grim places Hallet sealed his lips, but a definite set of ideas began to shape in the fury of his mind. He ordered the Dutchman's half-maddened outfit to close up on his own, but not to interweave. He distributed certain of his rations evenly down the one great column, and prepared to continue the daily march.

Brock was long delirious, and Hallet rendered the office of a physician, out of his own medicine chest. The quest pushed on.

Hallet had arranged to be summoned the instant Brock left the litter. But the great red-headed one, with the enormous hands and feet dangling on either side of his cot, was not likely to move for some days.

CHAPTER III.

THE CHIEFTAIN'S SEAL.

THEY had entered Lion Run—that curious track leading into the Hills of Makeda—which is to say, the hills of Sheba's queen—when a knot of fine-appearing black horsemen swept upon them with a hard flurry of hoofs and a challenge of strictly modern army rifles.

Hallet stood quickly before his band. In his right hand he held an amulet of whitened antelope skin, fringed with lion's mane. The captain of the mounted squad nodded obeisance to the talisman in Hallet's hand.

"O, friend of our mighty lord! Advance to our city where Ras Haffla will greet you."

The caravan resumed its stolid march. Now, Brock lifted the curtain of his litter and peered with a very calculating eye about him. His headman ran constantly beside him.

Dudley Hallet attended himself, with an eye to ceremonious greeting, and galloped out alone to the citadel of the local chieftain.

A member of this outpost squad of cavalry sped furiously ahead of Hallet. The American was shortly met and surrounded by a band of superbly horsed Abyssinians—straight-nosed Semitics—who swiftly took Hallet within the heart of the nearest settlement and through a stockade.

Ras Haffla awaited him with outstretched arms. Hallet had known him

before, and had been careful to be kind and cordial.

"You hunt hard stones in our land?" the chieftain quizzed him.

"Yes, but only with your permission to dig up and buy," Hallet replied gravely.

"My friend. Take all you want. You'll pay for them—but I'll let you fix your price. You are my friend. I trust you."

"Thank you. I'll take care to remain friends," assured Hallet.

"There is another in your train—another white man," Ras Haffla said in a grave tone.

Hallet nodded and hesitated. He finally told as much of the situation as he deemed advisable, explaining that the expeditions had joined owing to Brock's illness.

"He is your friend?" questioned the chieftain.

Hallet briefly cleared his throat. "No," he replied. Then he tried a simple and yet graphic exposition of the principle of sportsmanship.

"It was a strictly business rivalry," Hallet concluded, "and the outcome of the matter was sealed by Brock's sickness."

Hallet could have swiftly settled the Dutchman's fate with one unfriendly remark, but his grim lips held their own peace.

Ras Haffla considered for many moments and bowed gravely. "You have seals and things from Addis Ababa to mark this place of the stones as yours, when you find it?"

"Yes," answered Hallet, explaining the process of staking a claim.

"Well, to further safeguard you in my country, you may put my own seal on the claim—if you want to."

Hallet's eyes glittered keenly and swiftly, and for an instant his set mouth seemed wanting to laugh.

"Thank you," answered Hallet, taking the little damp mold of yellow clay

in which Ras Haffla had pressed his signet ring.

Twenty-odd slaves played weird reed music as Hallet swung into his saddle and rode back to lead the expedition over the last forward stretch.

Hallet's grimness increased. He did a particularly strange thing—for any man. He had placed on horseback, and watched incessantly, the black whose hands had been lopped off by Brock. This stoically resigned native, Hallet kept at all times within reach of his eyes. As Hallet watched, his mouth grew more grim.

OTHER unexplained things took place. Some strange excitement, a sort of fetish abandon, was seizing the Galla servants and bearers in the line. It is proverbial that the savage in his superstitious rites is better left alone.

However, an especially wild frenzy in the midst of one of these orgies ended in shrill screams and the death by the knife of Hallet's own trusted headman.

The American ran into the thick of the situation, seeking an explanation. A profound silence shut down, and strange to say Hallet laughed.

There was no doubt that Hallet was mad, but why did he laugh? Brock's own black lieutenants were mixed in the matter and yet Hallet received this knowledge with a smile. He considered Brock. A look into the litter, however, showed that the Dutchman tossed with half-shut, fevered eyes.

Hallet calmly went back to his station at the head of the line, and looked still and long at the man with no hands. A little later, without explanation, he laughed to himself again. So do men frequently break, in African adventures, let go physically and mentally.

Hallet shook his head, tipped unsteadily in his saddle, and wondered how affairs were back in Addis Ababa—if the consul's son was still scooting

about in his Ford, if Milwaukee beer at the comfortable end of Menelik Street was still cool and crispy.

Hallet became most careless in his personal appearance for the first time in his manhood, and took on, little by little, the outline and color of the disreputable Dutchman.

Like a bad omen, Brock was raving in his delirium and screaming, "The Lucky!" with dry, cackling laughter following forever after.

Sickness fell upon the double caravan. The stricken rolled themselves out of the files and resigned themselves to the jackals and the numerous prowling cats. Somehow, when an epidemic hits a caravan it visibly wilts and crumbles shoddily before the eyes.

Hallet seemed to fasten his will power upon his spine to rise to the occasion, and worked as a whole section of men would labor on a difficult piece of pioneering. He pulled and dragged the coiling train into the last recesses of the Hills of Makeda—into the shallows where the ground was as gritty and rotten as fruit turned black and petrified, and with depths harder than iron—harder than any but one thing in the world.

"Well, well—again. This is why they call me The Lucky," chuckled Hallet.

AT the end of the quest the red-headed one suddenly managed to get well. He seemed to throw off a pose, and he scrambled out of his litter. Virtually a prisoner in the midst of Hallet's train, he sullenly watched the American. Now, Hallet was sick himself.

The Dutchman covertly gathered his headmen about him and commenced to separate from the American's unit. It would still be dangerous to make any bold move. But Dudley Hallet didn't seem to watch any too closely. He was plainly careless.

Careless Hallet may have been, but he did what he had come fifteen hundred miles to do and did it passing well, although like a man carefully performing in his sleep. He packed several sacks full of the ore of black diamonds for assay purposes. The last thing he did was to hang the lumpish little clay seal of Ras Haffla on the claim. Lucky Hallet laughed as he did it.

Then he elaborately turned the expedition around, and struck into a trot for Addis Ababa. A half an hour away from the dreary claim with its wind-blown seal of a savage chieftain, Hallet reeled in his saddle. He immediately proclaimed himself sick and took to his litter.

With the reins of destiny almost in his hands, Brock furtively watched him. Hallet seemed visibly to go out of his head; one could see his wits slow down like a clock.

"Put me down," said the American.

The black men hesitated.

"Put me on the ground, you boys," said Hallet in his most dangerous whisper. In his hand was his black Colt revolver.

Brock strode over to him. "What's the matter?" he challenged.

"I'm going to stay here on the ground. I can't stand the swinging of this litter. I'm mighty sick. Go on, Brock. I'll catch up with you later."

The Dutchman stared at him, unbelieving, and slowly grinned. "Why, you—you're out of your head! You're insane!"

"Cut out that talking, Brock. Take this gabbing crowd out of the way. Take all the noise away—miles away. I want to sleep, on the ground."

The red-headed one hardly believed his ears. He stared under beetling, bushy eyebrows at his hitherto undefeated foe.

Dudley Hallet lay like a rag in the litter, and looked with unmoving glassy

eyes at the black savage whose hands had been cut off by Brock in one of his inhuman moments of anger.

"Yer—yer really crazy, Hallet?" Brock asked stupidly.

"Get on your way, Brock. I'm sick—sicker'n death. Go and leave me be here. I want quiet."

The Dutchman's hands twitched, his coarse mouth smiled, and he started to step forward in a deliberate and sinister manner toward the American's litter. Whatever his designs were, they were reconsidered. In Hallet's still hand, lay the fully charged revolver.

"All right; all right," barked the Dutchman. "Get on there, you!" he screamed to the wavering line of the expedition.

It was certainly curious, how lifeless, flat and neglected, the American's litter looked on that shaly ground, with its occupant stretched limply under the dirty netting.

CHAPTER IV.

TRIBAL ACTION.

WITH vast, leaping satisfaction, the Dutchman took charge of affairs. His murderous hands whipped about his belt and uncoiled a wire-thin snake whip. This weapon began to curl and snap all along that miserable column.

The long-suppressed energies of the Dutchman burst out. His hands did their cruel work, no less than his feet—those terrible, horny, bare feet that trampled and trod until the very earth seemed to bruise.

At intervals, in the business of brutalizing and bending the expedition until it suited him, the red-headed one paused—now and then—to laugh at Hallet.

"Well, Hallet—we'll say good-by, then. So you're going to catch up with us—eh? Ho! You are like anybody else." The Dutchman snorted. "Clever

they call you. But when you are sick you are like anybody else. You! Say, do you know how your headman was killed—that time? Hey?"

Brock looked with sly, cold eyes at the American. "Why, right now half of your gun bearers are dead and dying. You hear that? Me, sick in my litter, did that—while you were taking care of me."

Hallet seemed not to care enough to show any interest. He lay so flat he seemed to be a part of the pallet. From time to time his eyes turned toward the black who had no hands.

"So you think I was a *dummkopf* Dutcher, eh?" railed Brock. "And all the time you was playing stupid up front, I was killing your men with my fever and getting ready to take hold the expedition and put you down. Even if you hadn't gone sick, I would have taken it away from you."

The American smiled faintly.

"Ain't it so, Hallet? You, The Lucky. Why, you were so smooth and fine and—*aristocratic*—in Addis Ababa. Chalked helmet, silk-linen shirts, polished boots, and fine hair—and face shaved close as marble. Look at you. Lucky Hallet dyin', and dyin' like a dog."

The man in the litter seemed to be indifferent as clay, but before Brock had quite finished the other had raised the heavy black revolver in his hand.

"Go on! Get out of here. I want to sleep. But don't go back for those diamonds. Don't even try it. If you cross this way again I'll fill you with lead. I can shoot better lying down than I can standing up."

The Dutchman stared at him.

"And you know you deserve to die, Brock," the one called The Lucky remarked in his odd whisper. "Get on your way."

Some minutes later Brock's whip fell on the straining backs at the head of the dreary column, and the expedi-

tion swung, heavily laden, along the homeward trail.

When all was merely dust ahead, Hallet tried to squint until he could pick out the man with no hands. But there was no outline in the dust, only the muffled shades of sound that spoke of groaning and suffering—and the continual crack of a whip.

AND when a third of the day was spent, Hallet rose up off his mat, straightened his kinks out, and walked until he came to the top of a knoll overlooking the place of the diamond claim. Here he lay flat and concealed.

He did not have to wait long. Brock returned by a different route, a brace of black attendants with him, and made short work of destroying the first claim—even to breaking and casting to one side the clay seal of Ras Haffla. When the Dutchman's victory was completed, he went away again to where the sentry fires of the expedition smoked on the far horizon.

What Hallet saw made him smile the grimmest and strangest of smiles. But, when he would rise again, he was so weak that he shook over all his length.

"I *am* sick!" he cried. "I thought it was just a cold from the rains."

His footsteps faltered. He fell in the tough long grass. After a period, during which the swift and deadly fever of the east coast smote him from brain to heels, he got back to his litter by aimless wanderings.

In his litter again, Hallet suffered, gray with a dead stopping of his sweat glands—desperately sick.

Occasionally thoughts chased across his mind, and a sort of confusion that made it hard to distinguish his own voice from others.

For instance, somebody said: "There's hard luck goin' after diamonds. Somebody always dies."

And some one else said: "You tried three times to kill me."

And again, persistently, some voice taunted: "Look at you. Ho, ho! Lucky Hallet dyin' like a dirty dog!"

It was all badly mixed in his head. Once Hallet lifted his hand and felt of his face, and said: "Gee, I need a shave bad." And suddenly he seemed to go blind, and concrete blackness pressed right up against his face. But it was only night, and he had been asleep.

And his sight was restored, for he saw the lights of Irving's car coming toward him—slowly—the lights on the car driven by the son of the consul back in Addis Ababa.

But even as they came near him, a suspicion twisted and strained down through that cluttered mind of his and reached the forefront of his brain just in time to save his feeble life. He picked the revolver up in his hand and fired between the headlights of the car, which were pretty close at that time.

It was dazzling daylight when he awoke again, so weak that his jaw hung forward. A full-grown, great-thewed leopard sprawled four feet from his side, with a bullet hole between its eyes.

Once again he heard a collision of voices, and after a time they bothered him so that he paid attention.

Black men stood over him, powerful bucks in a kind of uniform or sameness of garb. They frowned down at him, and chattered between themselves.

"What shall we do? Put him to death? He was with that expedition."

"No; he is a friend of our chief. It would not be well to kill him."

"But he cannot move."

"We will drive the devils out of him."

THERE are powerful east African drugs that are very fit in certain diseases; that only the savage with the stomach of a vulture, and the dying, can react to. The men pondering over Hallet fed him these potions, and after

great pain and the flinching of his heart as if a needle probed its walls, he raised his head.

It was a little later that he looked more shrewdly from his eyes than he had looked for days. They saw that he was reviving and could be saved from death, and they swung him aloft in his litter.

"I know not his face, but I believe he is the friend of our master."

"We will prove it or no."

They carried him not very far, and they came to a long file of moving black life that loitered and sat about.

Great cries came up when he approached.

Hallet's captors or rescuers asked several questions of these other black men, who answered with frantic tongues. And slowly but orderly it came back to Hallet that this was his caravan, his own Galla blacks who shouted for joy.

Hallet's grim-faced guards were shouting in his ears. "Look," they commanded finally. "Do you know this?"

They indicated something large and squat by the roadside that bellowed and sang songs of roaring seas and nightmarish cities. Grapevine whips in the hands of maddened slaves belabored his head and shoulders.

But the blows were like the fluttering of flies, and didn't bother him. He was beyond pain, was the red-headed one, Brock, with both his hands and feet cut off. He sat slumped by the roadside, vastly dying, with his stumps of arms and legs laid crabwise about him.

Hallet nodded like a man whose wisdom comes from his own responsibility.

When the *sabaniyas*, or bodyguard, of Ras Haffla reported to their regal master, their spokesman said. "We saw that he who is Ras Hallet, him they call The Luckee, was taken sick and laid in the litter. Then this other white man—O, our powerful lord!—went

and broke your seal, which marked the place where the white man, Hallet, had been working.

"We don't know whether this other white man, who has hair like the color of a red moon, was doing what Ras Hallet allowed him to do or no. We only know that he broke your seal—lord our master—and that the penalty is the striking off of hands and feet."

AT this moment Ras Hallet was lying in his litter, breathing great recuperative breaths, as the diamond-laden train traveled safely toward Addis Ababa, and laughing dryly to himself. He spoke to another who walked by his side. "I waited—because I knew Brock's time was due soon, and I knew how it ought to come. I saw that Ras Haffla's soldiers were in that section spying out the diamond claim, just for curiosity.

"I knew that they'd see Herr Brock break and rifle the seals, and I knew the penalty for that was the *cutting off of hands*. I didn't reckon on the feet, which was almost too much. I meant to return to the expedition, but I didn't know I was so sick."

The one who walked at his side listened wisely. This one was a wandering priest who had joined the caravan for a short part of its route, and who now began to entertain his host by reading out of a frayed and illuminated Coptic manuscript in the Geez language.

"For they who are called lucky are the salt, the wit of the land," read the priest in a quavering, nasal voice, "'and they shall do with their brains what others see as the work of Fate.'"

But Hallet, who didn't in the least understand, interrupted easily. "Fetch my water boy, father, will you? Tell him to get my razors and my metal mirror and some water with soap in it. I want to shave and wash up. Diamonds are dirty."



Chester

MILD enough for anybody



What a cigarette meant there

The actors play their part—
and history moves thrillingly across the sil-
ver screen. But on the movie lot, how tense
the days of strain! And how gratefully
welcomed those hard-won moments that
mean rest, relaxation... and a cigarette!

What a cigarette means *here*

They play their part, too—
these buyers of Chesterfield tobacco.

Thousands of pounds auctioned each day; dis-
tinct types of leaf—twenty grades of "bright"
tobacco alone; important distinctions of curing;
differences in texture, color, size, in the natural
sugar which means natural sweetness — and
Chesterfield quality to be maintained.

Our buyers do their part. In New York or
Manila, Paris or Alaska, our billions of Ches-
terfields taste the same. The same wholesome
fragrance, the same natural mildness, the same
satisfying "body," because our buyers know ex-
actly what they want—and whatever it may
cost, they get it!

Liggett & Myers Tobacco Co.



field

.... and yet **THEY SATISFY**

*Typical scene in tobacco auction
warehouse, where the farmer's work
ends and the manufacturer's begins.*



Over the Hill

By Captain H. H. Baird, U.S. A.

PRIVATE SKAGGS was deserting his outfit—going “over the hill.” And going over the hill in the face of the enemy means—death.

From around the traverse in the darkness of the next firing bay came a sharp command. It was the lieutenant in charge of the coming raid. All men of his raiding party assembled for a last word of instruction. All but Skaggs. Furtively he glanced up and down the deserted firing trench. He was alone.

“Poor saps!”

He cursed vindictively the dripping clay bank, and muttered to himself.

“That bird ain’t gonna get me croaked. Let ’im take them saps over Hill 212 an’ its machine-gun nest. *This* guy’s tryin’ another kind o’ hill *right now*.”

To be certain that the way was clear and he was by himself, Skaggs listened for sounds from the rear along the communication trench. A bevy of Boche projectiles whistled overhead.

Skaggs crouched in silent apprehension until they clanged hollowly into the wilted leaves and bullet-clipped branches of the shadowy forest extending far to the rear.

Then his gaze darted toward the front, and No Man’s Land. What a place! A land of glowing, red Very lights, acres of rusty barbed wire, brilliant white flares, exposing to his tortured vision blasted tree skeletons in ghostly array—a land of mystery running over Hill 212. A land of mystery and—death.

As his senses took in these sights and sounds of war, a wicked, sardonic grin spread across his cruel mouth. Skaggs had killed before—but not in this wholesale manner. His killings had been done with neatness and dispatch.

“Gee!” he rasped under his breath.

“C’mon Skaggs. Get goin’.”

Deliberately he turned his back to the front, leaned his bayoneted rifle against the firing step, and lurched back along

the communication trench, carrying his sole remaining weapon, a trench dagger.

Gripped in a grimy fist, double edged and keen, its brass grip studded and deadly, it gave him a feeling of security—a sense of power. Nobody would stop him. Skaggs knew that. Nobody had *ever* stopped him—nobody but his captain.

“Ha-a-a-a!” That big brute of a captain, the slave driver, whose word was law and whose bulk backed up that law. There lay his only regret in leaving. But they’d meet—some day. His knife hand tightened at the thought.

THE raiding party about to jump off was directed at a concrete pill box whose machine gun covered Hill 212. In a previous attempt, eight men had been done in by its snapping defender. Careful plans had been laid to blow it up with TNT.

Private Skaggs, his face blackened with charcoal, his uniform camouflaged in burlap, was one of four scouts ordered to precede the detachment.

But days of preparation, the sickening suspense attending detailed rehearsal of coming scenes, the shadow of death stalking victims nightly in the mysterious land between the bands of wire; these were too much for nerves and character none too sound before he took his place in army ranks. His profession before service left much to be desired. He lived outside the law.

Suddenly the earth trembled. The rear sky, lit by irregular flashes of crimson after its first vivid flare, became a cracking, booming inferno. The strident bellow of howitzers wrecked the silence for scores of kilometers back into otherwise quiet areas. A few star shells exploded and hung in the air.

Skaggs instinctively fell flat in terror. His hands went above his head as if to ward impending danger from shattered nerves and body. Then, cursing

gutturally, he sprang up and shuffled back along the duck boards.

What was that? Approaching footsteps! Somebody running!

His ears picked up the sound above the barrage’s infernal din. Skaggs darted up the slippery trench side into a fresh shell depression. He hugged the wet wall frantically to avoid detection.

If they discovered him here he was lost. The officers would question his position, the lieutenant would verify his absence, he would be court-martialed, and then—the wall—and the firing squad.

Vaguely he heard his name shouted from the direction of the front. The lieutenant had already missed him! He gripped his trench knife with renewed determination. No! They would never take him alive!

THE soggy swish of a trench coat came to him—almost upon him—and running feet on the slimy duck boards.

Bitter associations flashed through his distorted mind. Trench coat—his captain—nobody in the company wore one but him—his big brute of a captain—the slave driver. Neatness and dispatch—where had he heard that before? Ah! This was it—his chance.

A panting form rushed at him and was about to pass. With a leopard’s savageness the waiting killer leaped down upon the runner’s back.

His glittering blade flashed thrice in the light of a ghostly white flare—a groan—a wild, overwhelming mass of struggling men, scraping hobnails—curses and grunts from the pursuing doughboys piling up on the duck boards.

“What the— Here, you—get up! Who got him? That you Skaggs? Good work, boy!” boomed the officer.

“I got him—I got the—” laughed Skaggs hysterically as he tore himself up and reeled away from the struggling

mass of men. "I croaked 'im awright, the——"

The insane cackle died on his lips as the deep tone and commanding voice of the officer finally penetrated his faltering senses. It was the voice of *his captain!*

THEY haled him before the generals, back at division headquarters next day. Skaggs was a hero. The raid had not been a success as far as the pill box was concerned. But Private Skaggs had killed an internationally famous Austrian spy.

The spy, with important information of a coming Allied offensive, had attempted a desperate escape to the German lines by impersonating an American officer and going over with the raiding party.

Seeing Skaggs' nerves were pretty badly shot, the medicos bolstered him up. "Verge of shell shock," they diagnosed his case. He was decorated when his outfit came out of the line—Croix de Guerre, D. S. C.—other medals coming.

Skaggs endured it all with a terrible, unnatural calm. *They* didn't know, his buddies, all these generals—his *captain*. Skaggs felt different toward his captain now.

ONE night, two weeks later, his company reentered the line and Private Skaggs stood in the same firing bay—alone—on lookout.

Toward dawn the dozing, khaki-clad figures in the next bay became suddenly alert. Over beyond Hill 212 the chatter of a Boche Maxim split the darkness and sent echoes crashing hollowly through the silent woods. One long burst. A hoarse shout. Then—silence.

"Them bozos has th' willies," mumbled a sleepy private, and lapsed again into drowsy stupor.

At dawn they found Skaggs' post deserted. His rifle was there and his bayonet. The latter had been stabbed into the wall's loose earth. On it hung his belt and a Bull Durham sack.

The lieutenant shook out his medals, and a note scrawled with a dull lead on a dirty newspaper edge.

"Can't stick it," said the scribble. "Medals is O. K. but not for mine. This guy ain't no hero." That was all.

Nobody ever saw Private Skaggs again. And though the pill box that had raked their ranks was silent for two days, nobody ever understood. For Skaggs had gone over the hill. And over the hill in the face of the enemy means—death.

PAID IN ADVENTURE

By Laurence J. Cahill

An Adventure Story of Hallet, the Lucky,

Complete in Our Next Issue.

You—and Your Career

By John Hampton

A Department of Interviews with Successful Men, and Information
and Advice for Ambitious Men.

CHARLES WARREN ROBIE, EXPRESS.



WHEN you say a man is successful, what do you mean? In your opinion, is a man a success if he retires, quits working? Is he a success if he has sufficient funds to retire, but doesn't? Would you call a man successful if he had achieved financial independence, but had made this money in a business that he always had disliked heartily?

You should formulate your ideas of success, find out what it is you want. Get a clear-cut idea of what you desire in this world. If money is what you're after, go where the money is, whether you have an inclination toward that particular sort of business or not.

If you'd like to be happy in your work, enjoy the business that you're in, the immediate financial return is not so important. Eventually you'll find that the joy of laboring in a congenial occupation will affect your income. A man who likes his work will be a success at it. And that success, in the course of time, will appear in your bank account. That fact has been proved innumerable times.

Every one wants to be independent financially. Even though you may not want to loaf the rest of your life, you're curious about men who could do so, if they wished. Here's the story of a country boy. Years ago he was unknown, inconspicuous. At the time

this article was written, he had direct supervision of the American Railway Express Co.'s affairs in twelve Eastern States, where approximately one third of the total yearly business of that huge concern is handled. Under his authority are enough men to people a city the size of Poughkeepsie, New York.

An express wagon drives past. It's part of this enormous organization that does business from ocean to ocean, throughout this continent.

Express means quick transportation. Breakfast oranges from Florida and California; steak from Chicago; food-stuffs from everywhere; fresh-cut flowers in the florists' shops and much of the stock in any shop is moved by express. Everywhere you go you will see the express trucks and wagons painted with the distinctive color scheme of the company. It is a business of unceasing change and of wide interest.

It is a big company. It has offices in the cities and in the small country towns. Years ago it offered a chance to Mr. Robie. To-day it offers opportunities to men and young men everywhere. The chances are often better in the small town for the man who wants to work for a large company, according to Mr. Robie, and a man should not feel his opportunities are limited because he lives in the country.

Mr. Robie's cheerful ruddy face

lights up and his eyes have a friendly twinkle when he meets a stranger. After a firm handshake, he sits before his perfectly ordered desk and talks easily and naturally. A glow comes into his clear-skinned cheeks whenever he speaks about his youthful exploits and struggles. Chance brought him the opportunity, but Charles Warren Robie achieved success only through his own efforts.

As a boy he worked on his father's farm at Winona, New Hampshire, which was known as Foggs Station then. His dreams had nothing to do with the farm or even the express business. Warren, as he was called, had more romantic ideas. He wanted to be an engraver, a printer and publisher; or else maybe a hunter of big game in the jungles, but fate decreed otherwise.

He had an uncle who was agent at Plymouth, New Hampshire. It was a "lump" agency, a station where the agent got a certain sum yearly, and for that amount took charge of all the company's business at the agency. All expenses were borne by the agent and covered by the annual salary.

The uncle's helper was taken suddenly ill, and in seeking to replace him, the uncle appeared at his brother's farm. Warren Robie's father objected, but in spite of his protests the boy was drafted for the job.

"I earned," remarked Mr. Robie, "and notice I say I *earned*, the princely sum of twenty-five cents a day to start. Later, I was boosted to fifty cents, and by the time I left my uncle I was getting one dollar daily.

"Of course," he continued, "I got my board also, and to my boyish mind board loomed big and powerful. A boy likes to know that his meals are coming regularly."

Warren Robie's name wasn't even on the pay roll, but his duties were as numerous as they were varied. He got up

early every morning and looked after the horse and wagon. He swept the office, he trucked, met trains and made deliveries and helped with the clerical work in the office. This experience and training proved invaluable later on. He learned everything about the express business of that time in Plymouth.

A readiness to learn, coupled with his ambition, has been a dominant factor in his success. He wasn't especially interested in the express business, but he worked hard and faithfully. It was in his code to give his best. Still he dreamed of becoming an engraver and printer. In fact, he began to try his hand at engraving in his spare time.

His first efforts were at making woodcuts. He had no training, and Mr. Robie says they were pretty crude, but he didn't think so at the time. He took them to a near-by printer for criticism and suggestion. He got both.

The criticism was that his work was not clearly cut. The suggestion was that he do his carving on the end of the grain instead of on the side as he had been doing.

"It had never occurred to me," Mr. Robie declared with a twinkle in his eye, "that I should work on the end of the grain. Many a time I had some masterpiece virtually finished when it would splinter and be ruined—the labor of weeks gone."

Now, he can smile at those disappointments, but they were serious matters then.

"My stuff couldn't have been so very bad," he went on, "or else that printer was a very friendly man. He loaned me a set of six engraving tools, told me to try working with boxwood and maple and sent me on my way rejoicing."

With the proper instruments and materials, Warren's woodcuts showed immediate improvement. He soon began making engravings for near-by

merchants, making extra money that way. He earned his first watch by doing some work for the local jeweler.

"It wasn't much of a watch," admitted Mr. Robie, a reminiscent smile on his face, "but at seventeen a watch is a watch, and you don't ask too much!"

After the watch came his first suit of "store clothes." Mr. Robie says that he felt more dressed up in that suit than he does to-day in faultlessly tailored clothes. Even yet his eyes light up when he describes the outstanding events in those early days of toil and effort.

Mr. Robie has a justifiable pride in his early work as an engraver. A framed collection of his efforts at woodcuts hangs on the walls of his office. The work is crude, but at the same time it shows undeniable evidences of ability and painstaking skill. He surveyed them thoughtfully.

"You know," he said slowly, "while I think I probably would have made a good engraver and printer, I'd have missed lots of other things; things that are invaluable; the broad contacts I've had. My circle of friends and acquaintances would necessarily have been restricted. I would have missed the keen enjoyment I've had in working with the men with whom I've been associated in business. And when all's said and done, I count these associations more highly than any material success.

"I decided that my best chance to succeed was with the express company," Mr. Robie continued. "I've never regretted that decision. I think that one of the most valuable things in life is to see an opportunity and make the most of it."

Mr. Robie believes that there is always a chance for the man who is willing and ready when opportunity comes.

After three years with his uncle in Plymouth, New Hampshire, Warren Robie went to Lowell, Massachusetts.

It was in this job that his name finally appeared on the company pay roll. His salary in this new position was fifty dollars a month, but now board was not included. It was "find yourself."

"This 'find yourself' was a blow. I could eat, did and must eat—what boy doesn't?—and by the time I'd paid for my room and bought what clothes I needed, paid for other little necessities and my board, there was blamed little left of the fifty dollars. But even at that I managed to save a little."

At Lowell Mr. Robie realized more fully the vast possibilities of the express business. New angles of the enterprise were constantly being presented, things that had never come up at Plymouth. He learned more about receiving and forwarding packages; financial details and increased clerical work in the main office all became grist to his mill. He learned as he worked, and as he learned he expanded. He had faith in the growth of rapid transportation.

"And, by the way," here Mr. Robie interrupted himself, "Let me say right here and now that if any young fellow thinks that he wants to go to work for a large company, thinks that he wants to follow right through with it and make it his life work, he can't do any better than join up with that company in a small town. For it's in the small town that you get the actual human touch by rubbing shoulders in your everyday life.

"And you get a more thorough knowledge of the essentials of the business, a broad general experience that cannot be had in the departmentalized offices in the big cities. Small-town conditions, with their intimate contacts of all sorts of problems and the human feeling between company and customer, provide a foundation upon which the specific knowledge and skill gained in specialized departments can be built in later years."

After staying in Lowell three years, Mr. Robie was transferred to Boston as a clerk in the office of the superintendent of the Massachusetts division. His salary was now seventy-five dollars a month. In this new job he saw a chance to learn more about the express business and once more he grasped his opportunity. This same desire for learning led him to accept the position as route agent at Springfield, another line of express work. This, too, helped to fit him to become superintendent of the Massachusetts division in 1896, with headquarters in Boston. In 1906 Mr. Robie was made assistant general manager, in charge of New England.

In 1918 when the express merger was completed, Mr. Robie became general manager of the consolidated companies in charge of New England, and on January 1, 1924, he went to New York as vice president of Eastern departments, taking the position vacated by Robert E. M. Cowie, who was elevated to the presidency.

The American Railway Express Co. is one of the largest companies in the United States. Mr. Robie's rise from the driver's seat of an express wagon to the vice presidency is one of the most remarkable feats in our business history. His is one of the most important positions in the country. Mr. Robie has a friendly charm that is disarming. You think of him as your friend immediately. Contact with the public has given him poise and ease of manner.

Charles Warren Robie presents an ideal picture of the successful business man. His eye is clear and keen, his skin ruddy, his hair and Vandyke beard blond, and his fine strong hands are constantly busy. His desk is always in order, with no confusion of papers and books.

Unlike so many business men, Mr. Robie doesn't play golf or cards. He doesn't hunt or fish. But like so many

successful men, he has kept his early home. He still has the old farm at Winona, and he goes up there on weekends during the summer. In the country he has no especial pursuit, such as gardening or riding. He likes to "just putter around" as he puts it, walking a little, reading and talking with his neighbors.

Though he denies having a hobby, his love of people crops out at every turn. He likes to talk about people; he likes to meet them and study them. From the firm friendly handshake with which he greets you, to the final clasp as he says good-by, he shows his keen interest in people. He is interested in the individuality of human beings.

Perhaps his feeling for people is responsible for the philosophy that Mr. Robie expressed about business:

"Act natural. Do business on top of the table. Apply the Golden Rule. Smile and be human."

This is the boy who started at twenty-five cents a day on the seat of a country express wagon. He is one of the highest paid executives in the United States. Mr. Robie has direct supervision of the most important section of the American Railway Express Co.'s business, a section that covers more than enough railroad mileage to belt the earth; there are over seventy-five hundred vehicles, including thirty-five hundred motor trucks; there are fifty-five hundred officers under him and a huge army of employees.

A key to it all? Mr. Robie is too modest to urge you to follow his example, but he would like to see every man, "Act natural. Do business on top of the table. Apply the Golden Rule. Smile and be human."

That's the story of a man who had one ambition, but discarded it for another. He wanted to be an engraver, but succeeded with an express company. He found work that he enjoyed, learned it thoroughly. In that con-

genial business, he gained position and power, happiness and a splendid income.

His advice is simple, clear, practical. Does it sound worth while trying? Experiment with it. For a week, decide to "Act natural. Do business on top of the table. Apply the Golden Rule. Smile and be human."

What are the problems that confront you in your daily life? At the end of this article are problems faced by other men. The questions raised have been answered. See if your situation is similar to those brought up by readers. Read the replies and note the ones that apply to you.

Every one who is ambitious, anxious to improve himself and his surroundings, at times is doubtful as to the wise course to pursue. At such times, disinterested advice, the opinion of some one else, is invaluable. Even if the advice is not accepted, it will aid you in making up your own mind.

Let's talk over your career, your plans for the future. Write what you are doing, what you want to do. Mention the difficulties you have surmounted, outline those that still remain to be conquered.

Be sure to write plainly, clearly, giving your name and address. An individual reply will be sent to each letter. Questions of general interest will also be answered in this department. All communication will be regarded as confidential and signatures will be withheld.

Your comments are requested upon this department, the letters published, and the replies. If you disagree with the advice given, say so. In your experience and observation you may have solved, or seen others solve, the problems brought up here. In that case, your advice is invited.

Address all letters to John Hampton, TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

DEAR MR. HAMPTON: I'm getting forty dollars a week, which is pretty good pay, compared to other fellows I know, who are about my age. The firm I work for is old-fashioned in some ways. The way it looks to me, I'll stay at this salary for ten years, at least, before I'll get a raise. There's an older man in the office, doing the same sort of work I am, and he just gets the same pay I do.

Now I've got a chance to go with another firm in the same line, but it doesn't pay as well. But I believe the chance of more pay is better with them. And I'll be right in line for promotion. Still, I don't want to work for less money, if I can help it. What do you advise me to do?

T. P. W.
Nebraska.

Ans. First, make sure about your opportunities for promotion with the firm that is employing you at present. Consult your immediate superior and get something more definite from him. Realize that unless your services are worth more money than you're getting, you won't be entitled to more.

Then chat with employees of the firm who have made you the offer of a position at a smaller salary. Find out this firm's attitude toward its personnel. Analyze your reaction toward this attitude. Compare it with the policy of your present employer. Which firm would you prefer to work for?

Immediate financial income is important, opportunity to increase your income is likewise important. Don't accept the position at less pay unless the outlook for a larger salary in the future is good. As far as possible, get accurate information about the chances for promotion.

With all of this information at hand, you should be able to decide whether it would be wise to change. If you do, be sure to leave your old employer pleasantly, amicably. Try to arrange matters so that if you want to return, you can do so.

DEAR MR. HAMPTON: I've finished high school, and my parents want me to go to college. But I want to go to work. Is a col-

lege education necessary for success in life? It seems like a waste of time to me.

I want to support myself, have my own money, spend it as I please. My father hasn't had a college education and he's a prominent man in this town. If he got along all right without much education, why can't I?

W. K. S.

Texas.

Ans. If you can go to college, do so. A college education is not an assurance that you will be successful in later years, but it gives you many advantages over those who have not been so fortunate.

You can, of course, waste your time in college, almost ignore the opportunities for education offered you. But worth-while contacts can be made during those years, culture gained, a profession learned.

Very few men, of the thousands who graduate each year, regret the time they've spent in college. Many men who have been forced by circumstances into business life at an early age have regretted their lack of education.

You are fortunate in having this opportunity. Your father is trying to give you something he has not had, something he wanted, something he realizes is valuable and marketable. The business world will wait patiently until you graduate. You will be able to find work four years from now—perhaps better-paying work than you can secure now.

DEAR MR. HAMPTON: I've a chance to buy a cigar store, that's making good money. The owner wants one third down, the balance at intervals of three months between notes. I've got enough saved to pay half down, so I'll be able to clear it off all right.

Now here's the trouble. I'm engaged to be married. My future wife says I don't know anything about running a cigar store. I know I'll like it, and I can learn how to run it after I own it, can't I? I've told her that about a dozen times, but still haven't convinced her that she's wrong. What do you say about this argument?

F. W.

Indiana.

Ans. Why not work in the cigar store for a while, as a clerk, paid or unpaid? In that way, you could find out the fine points of the business, get an accurate idea of the actual income, the profit, the hours, and so on.

Your fiancée is correct in saying that you know nothing about running this business, it appears. Sure, you'll learn how after it's yours, but why wait until then to get wise to the game? Mistakes made through ignorance can be costly. Six months as a clerk in the store will give you much valuable information.

DEAR MR. HAMPTON: I want to be a writer. I can think of many good plots, but my English is not very good. Friends who have read my work think that my stories are as good as those they see printed. I sent one story to a magazine, but it was rejected.

Can I learn how to put my stories in such shape that they will be published in magazines? Do they buy stories just from professional writers, or will they take stories from anybody? How much do writers get for their stories?

A. P.

Louisiana.

Ans. You can improve your English by study and by reading. A writer sells words, interestingly arranged, intelligently selected, properly used. If you are really determined to be an author, you will study and practice until you can write English clearly, understandably, forcefully.

Story-writing is easy for some people to learn, difficult for others—and not worth the time and trouble to many. Just as practically every one can learn to draw "a little," so almost every one can learn something about writing stories. Go to the nearest public library, get some books on short-story technique. The rest depends upon you—your ability to comprehend, your capacity to apply what you comprehend.

Most fiction magazines buy from both professional and free-lance writers.

The price paid for stories varies with

the magazine, the length and quality of the story, and the author's reputation.

W. J., Maine. If you don't control your temper, how do you expect to control your subordinates? Naturally you have trouble with them. By becoming angry, you lose their respect and arouse their antagonism. By speaking hastily, violently, you probably give orders that can be misunderstood. Then, when you are not obeyed to your own satisfaction, you blame the workman, instead of yourself!

At present, you're not holding down your job, and you know it. Either learn to control your temper, or get a different kind of job. You can learn to control your temper. You probably do control it when you're speaking to one of the big officials of the company.

J. L. B., Idaho. You're "sufficiently" appreciated if your work is held up as a model to other employees, and if your pay is increased without a request on your part. What more do you want? Your employer should not be expected to spend all his time patting you on the back.

J. V., Washington. Consult your banker about the bonds you have purchased. Follow his advice and respect his opinions. Ask him before investing money hereafter, and you'll be saved much worry.

H. W., New Jersey. You don't want advice or information. From your letter it seems that you want to be told that what you're going to do is wise and intelligent. You know it's silly and stupid.

W. B., Tennessee. Ignore your enemy's sneers and "office politics." He'll get tired of taunting you, if his effort to annoy you fails. The time will come when this wire-puller will get his wires twisted.

S. S., Missouri. Resign at once and start somewhere else. Your health is more important than the salary you're getting. Your wife is right, so take her advice. All the money in the world is worthless to a man with a tombstone on his chest.

P. A. B., Michigan. Many men would jump at the opportunity offered to you. Others would not. Would you rather be a little frog in a big puddle, or a big frog in a little puddle? You've tried one. In the big town you're nobody of importance. In a little town—which is where you'll go if you accept this offer—you'll be a real somebody! You'll have to decide yourself.

Address all letters to John Hampton, Top-Notch Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

What's Your Worry?

Present Your Problem to JOHN HAMPTON.

YOU—AND YOUR CAREER

appears exclusively in

TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE.



The Stranger in Black

By Hapsburg Liebe

COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

CHAPTER I.

MOUNTAINEER HOODLUMS.

HAVE you ketched ary un, bud?" the horseman inquired softly, and for the third time. The boy's attention was riveted fast to the line that ran from the small end of his sycamore fishing pole into the swirling, laurel-bordered mountain stream. Suddenly he jerked hard and high—and hooked a hemlock branch overhead.

"Hit was a dad-burned crawfish," he said in acute disgust. "No, I ain't ketched nary un. All I've ketched is a dad-burned hemlock tree, i-gonnies. Look up thar, will you? Ain't that hell?"

"You ortn't to say them bad words, bud," the stranger reproved. His rich baritone drawl—the drawl of the mountain-born—should have been engaging. He went on: "I reckon yore mammy would paddle you, likely, ef she knowed you said bad words."

The bareheaded, barefooted boy choked back a hot retort, and perhaps it was because he saw so much that was striking about the man. He was in black, this stranger, and it was expensive black. He had on a broad-brimmed felt hat, knee-high boots of fine leather with his trousers folded neatly into them, a brocaded vest that concealed a belt of cartridges, and a Prince Albert coat that kept two holstered revolvers from the gaze of the

curious. Even his long-legged and lean blue-grass horse was black.

Although he couldn't have been older than thirty-three, the stranger wore a heavy mustache that curved upward at the ends, and a full, pointed beard. They were well cared for, dark-brown and silky, and gave him an air that was half regal. His eyes were of a greenish-gray color, and very keen.

"Whose boy air you?" he inquired.

The lad fidgeted. He hitched at his homemade jeans trousers and his one suspender, and ran a sunburned hand through his hair. It was hair of the peculiar reddish color that later is apt to become auburn.

"Sally Emmaline Faidley's," he answered, finally. "She calls me 'Little Red Fox' fer a pet name. Awful purty, Sally Emmaline is; purtiest woman that ever was, not to be married. Bunce Hatton wants her, i-gonnies, but he shore ain't a-goin' to git her. Mighty right, he won't. Bunce is so low-down the buzzards wouldn't pick him ef he was dead."

The countenance of the horseman betrayed no more than casual interest. "Why, ain't Sally already married? You 'lowed you was her boy."

"Not her; she ain't never married nobody." Little Red Fox assumed an important manner. "But she ain't my shore-enough mammy. She jest 'dopted me when I was a day old, to keep 'em from a-throwin' me away. Mustn't never tell her I done that cussin', mister. She a heap tetchious, with cussin'."

The stranger summoned a smile, but not without effort. "All right, bud, I won't tell her, but you better not cuss any more, hit ain't a bit nice. I'll ride over and take that hook down fer you now."

Little Red Fox grinned his appreciation. There in that back o' beyond, that broad and for the most part thickly wooded valley that separated Big Rip

Shin and Smoky Thunder Mountains, fishhooks were fishhooks.

"Mebbe hit was luck that I happened to run acrost you, bud," the man said as the boy wound his line on the smaller end of the sycamore sprout. "Was yore pappy a big, fightin' sawt o' feller named 'Scrapper,' Scrapper Ledford?"

"That was him, yeuh." It came with a hard frown. "Why? Who air you, mister? What's yore name? Whar air you from?"

"I'm from Kaintucky, whar I was most gen'ally knowed as 'Jack the Cleaner,' but my right name is Dolliver."

The boy was still frowning. "Dolliver," he repeated; "Jack Dolliver. Sounds big. What do you clean—clothes?"

"Sometimes," Dolliver answered frankly and soberly, "I cleans people. Sometimes by a-fumigatin' 'em good with powder smoke. Sometimes with my plain fists. Now and then I cleans 'em with a deck o' cards. I ain't no reg'lar gambler, y' unnerstand, bud. I jest likes a game, 'casionally with folks which can afford to lose the money. Hit keeps me from a-thinkin' too hard on other subjicks, mebbe."

"But what o' my pappy?" Little Red Fox asked pointedly.

Jack Dolliver exploded a verbal bomb:

"Up thar in Kaintucky, Scrapper Ledford and me was pow'ful thick. Hawk wild, he was, but a dandy feller, and he's dead now. Me and him made us a big pile o' cash money on a coal-land option, and he wanted me to take his part o' the money to you, his boy."

The lad blinked, then flared: "I won't have nary cent o' hit—he runned off and left me when I was a teeny baby only a day old. Ef Sally Emmaline hadn't 'dopted me they'd ha' to throw me away! Her and Grandpap Thurst Faidley, her pappy, thinks I don't

know, but I do; me, I've hieard 'em talk a right smart when they thought I was asleep. My—my——"

He choked, swallowed, continued doggedly: "My daddy was mad at me bekaze my mammy died when I was borned. He was mad at everybody in the world, Grandpap Thurst said. He'd been a rip-snortin' bad'aig, and had turned a new leaf when he married, a-hittin' off a truce with the law, Grandpap Thurst said. Atter my pore mammy was put in onder the ground, he got b'ilin' drunk and got on his hawse and lit out, a-shootin' and a-cussin' as he went!"

Dolliver shook his head slowly. Then he squinted an eye toward the homing sun, which was just burning a notch in the fringe of pines on the high crest of Big Rip Shin.

"Reckon yore grandpap'd keep me to-night, Little Red Fox?"

"He never turns nobody away," was the prompt answer. Into a pocket of the jeans trousers went the broken-off tip of the sycamore fishing pole, taking hook and line with it. "Le' me ride ahind you, Mr. Jack, huh?"

THE horse and its two riders had made scarcely a hundred yards when four men, each carrying a repeating rifle as though the weapon were a part of him, suddenly blocked the laurel-lined trail ahead.

"Yanner's them low-down Hattons!" whispered Little Red Fox Ledford. "'Old Buz,' and Bunce, and Ab, and 'Sink' Bunce 'lowed he was a-goin' to cut my ears off. You won't let him, Mr. Jack, will you?"

"Not hardly," Dolliver whispered back. "Don't worry none, bud."

Except for the matter of age, a description of one of this quartet of unwashed mountaineer hoodlums fits all. They were tall and loose-jointed, scraggily bearded, with small and oddly opaque black eyes, and faces that

were hatchet-thin and weasel-cunning. To a man, they wore buttonless hickory shirts and brown jeans trousers, slouch hats, and rusty cowhide boots.

Jack Dolliver drew rein a scant rod from them. "Howdy, fellers," he said straightforwardly.

It was the half-gray old Busby Hatton, father of the three others, that reluctantly returned the greeting.

"Howdy, i-god." He growled on: "Say, you—we ain't got no rimpions o' respeck fer any law officer which ain't got gut-insides enough to wear his badge, 'stead o' keepin' hit in his pocket fer a play purty!"

"Well, well—so that's what has been a-bitin' you so bodacious!" exclaimed Dolliver. "I wondered why you four had kept me in yore sight ever sence I rode acrost that fire scald at the lower end o' the valley more'n a hour ago. Now I don't court no upscuddle, never no time. Look; did you ever see a law officer what could do this? Watch!"

From somewhere inside the Prince Albert coat, Dolliver took a pack of playing cards. With one deft hand he strung them into a rainbow in the air above his horse's head; with the other deft hand he gathered them up. He made a vertical column a yard in length with them. Each card fell back to his palm, forming a neat pack. Presto!—the cards vanished before the very eyes of the onlookers. Presto!—he found them in his hat. Again the pack disappeared. It was in his pocket.

Then Jack Dolliver gave quick, caressing touches to his silky beard and mustache, and smiled at his audience. "Law officers cain't do that!"

Bunce Hatton was toying with the trigger of his rifle. "Gambler," he muttered.

"Not so much a gambler as a cleaner," Dolliver told him. "Well, I must be a-ridin' o' my hawseflesh, men. Good day!"

Before he had finished speaking he had ridden between Old Buz and Ab Hatton, who were staring at him dumbly. His mount at once broke into a canter on the stony trail. Neither man nor boy looked back.

Soon they met the other Hatton, giant brother of Ab and Bunce and Sink. His slattern mother had nicknamed him "Pip," and he was an imbecile. A prognathous jaw, he had, and monstrous hands that carried an old rifle.

"Mister, gi' me a nickel," he whined. Dolliver produced a quarter.

"No"—the boy whispered quickly—"he don't know nothin' but a nickel, and he'll cuss you. He'll do anything fer a nickel. That gun ain't loaded. He jest totes it around that a way. His folks won't let him have ca'tridges."

Having received a five-cent piece, Pip shouted in glee and hurried on.

"I'm sorry fer that idjit," muttered Dolliver. "Ef only human people was as keerful o' their own breed as they air o' the breeds o' their hawsses and hawks and cattle, God A'mighty wouldn't never haf to print another Bible, ner men set down another law."

CHAPTER II.

NIGHT DANGER.

THE old Faidley house was of flat-hewn logs and two stories in height. The home of a mountaineer aristocrat, it was set in cathedral-spined cedars, gnarled apple trees, grapevines, and flowering shrubs. Grandpap Thurston Faidley, tall and gaunt, white-haired and white-bearded, sat dreaming on the vine-shaded front porch. His wife had long been with the majority, and of eight sons and daughters only Sally Emmaline had not married and flown the old home nest for some distant section.

He received Jack Dolliver hospitably, fed and otherwise cared for the weary

horse, then returned to the front porch with his guest. When Little Red Fox had gone to take the freshly milked cow back to her pasture, Dolliver outlined his mission.

"So pore Scrapper Ledford is dead," sadly observed the patriarch without a people. "Yes, I reckon hit'd be all right fer the boy to have his pappy's money, but hit ort to be put in some good bank ontel he's of age. When he's twenty-one, mebbe he'll see the need o' money."

"I s'pect you blame Scrapper a good deal," ventured Dolliver.

Grandpap Thurst lighted his clay pipe before he replied: "Well, yes—ard also, no. He was a wild young buck, undoubtedly, but we had to like him some. That flax-headed Vi'ginia gyurl and him didn't gee wuth a cent attar they was married, though he apparently went crazy over her when she died at the boy's bornin'. They was jest too spang much alike to git along together fer good, Mr. Dolliver. Both fire-and-tow, they was. Nary one of 'em 'd even had a sweetheart afore they met each other. Hit was a sorry mistake, shorely, them two a-marryin'."

Dolliver was about to speak again, to ask concerning Scrapper Ledford's relatives, when a musical feminine voice from the doorway behind him announced supper. It was Sally Emmaline, just past thirty, round of figure but hardly buxom, handsome rather than merely pretty, and as wholesome as mortal may be.

Jack Dolliver shook her capable hand with something akin to reverence. Then he followed her and Grandpap Thurst in to supper.

Dusk was gathering, and a glass-bowled lamp burned on the dining table, which was laden with savory, old-fashioned dishes. The three of them were half through with the meal, when Little Red Fox returned from the pasture. The boy carried a thick bundle

of hickory withes—switches quite heavy enough for the whipping of any horse.

"Looky what I found at the front gate!" he cried.

Grandpap Faidley rose hastily, and drew the shades at the two dining-room windows as a matter of precaution. "Put them down and eat yore supper, Red Fox," he ordered, determined that the appetite of his guest should not be wholly spoiled.

At last Dolliver crossed knife and fork carefully on his plate, sat back in his chair, faced his host, and said: "O' course, I know that the Hattons fetched them withes as a warnin' to me to leave here."

Faidley glowered. The boy spoke indistinctly because his mouth was so full of chicken leg: "I betcha Bunce Hatton brung them hick'ries on account he thinks you've come a-courtin' Sally Emmaline, Mr. Jack!"

Sally Emmaline flushed.

Again Dolliver addressed her father: "I've been intendin' to ax you, grandpap. What's become o' Scrapper Ledford's kin?"

"I ain't a-goin' to have nary cent o' that money," Little Red Fox cut in.

Old Faidley ignored the boy's intrusion, and drawled measuredly: "Hit has allus been my desire fer visitors to enjoy theirselves when they're with me, Mr. Dolliver, and I am sorry this had to bob up. But hit has bobbed up jest the same, and I reckon I mought as well face the music.

"Scrapper Ledford's pap and mother died afore he run off. The rest o' his kin moved 'way out to Texas. Ef the Ledfords was still here, the Hatton bunch couldn't run things like they do. Why, when Scrapper was only eighteen, he thrashed Old Buz and all his sons—'ceptin' Pip, the idjit—with nothin' but a ax handle! Scrapper? Hit was a fust-class name fer him, Mr. Dolliver.

"But now them Hattons and their low-down kin, the Tresslers and Torreys, has got to be awful. They shoot, kill, burn, steal, make and run blockade whisky and the law cain't lay hands on 'em. Ketch 'em in their own thickets? She jest cain't be done. This fine valley usened to be knowed as Ledford's Laurel, a purty name. But now hit's knowed fer and wide as Hell's Kitchen, and the Hatton bunch is 'sponsible!"

Jack Dolliver's greenish-gray eyes were narrow. "Is that—right?"

"That shore is right," Grandpap Thurst told him grimly. "Why, they've stole my grain ontel hit don't pay to raise grain, and stole off my stock ontel I ain't got hardly none left. Wouldn't do to kick to the law; them Hattons would burn us out fer that.

"They'd ha' burnt us out anyhow, I think, hadn't been that Bunce expects to marry Sally thar. You cain't 'magine how hit has worried the pore gyurl, her a-makin' some new excuse every time he comes to see her. She has begged me to keep the last ca'tridge in my rifle fer her, ef hit comes—to a show-down——"

His voice broke at that. His daughter bent her head, and so did the boy that worshiped her.

Then Faidley rose and left the dining room, and Little Red Fox hastened after him.

There was silence over the house for a long minute. The voice of Dolliver came drawling: "Well, mebbe my nickname o' Jack the Cleaner ain't a plum' foolish joke, Sally Emmaline. When my hawss has rested fer a hour or so, I'll saddle up and ride the night."

He got to his feet. She looked at him with dim eyes. It occurred to him that Scrapper Ledford had been a nitwit in one way, at least. Scrapper Ledford had gone to Virginia for the pepper-pod girl—peace to her ashes—that he had married, though he might have

had Sally Emmaline, a jewel of the first water, there at home—if not, why had Sally taken his baby, when she must have had to almost fight the women of his people in order to get it? Jack Dolliver knew the mountaineer heart extremely well.

"You'll find danger, ridin' the night here," she murmured. "But ef you do go, better take my pappy's rifle."

Dolliver drew back his long, black coat and showed her his two holstered revolvers. "With ary one o' them," he told her, "I can bust a walnut in the air. Yore worries, Sally Emmaline, air over, or Jack the Cleaner ain't nothin' but meat fer the graveyard."

Parenthetically, there is a world of difference between an idle boast and a plain statement of fact.

AN hour afterward, Dolliver gave into the old hillman's keeping the sixteen hundred dollars in bank notes that he had brought from Kentucky for the boy, and left the place, with explicit directions for finding certain other houses in the valley.

The rocky and guttered road led him first to the hopelessly dilapidated old log house that had been the boyhood home of Scrapper Ledford. It was gray and ghostlike in the pale glow of the newly risen orange moon; more a tomb, it seemed, than anything else—a tomb of memories. Somewhere in there Scrapper Ledford had knelt at the first and best of life's altars, a good woman's knee, and learned to say his "Now I Lay Me——"

Never had this stranger in black been much given to tender thoughts. He was ready to put spur to his mount, and be away, when there came to his ears the mumbling of masculine voices. A moment later, a feeble light shone from one of the paneless windows.

Dolliver jerked his horse's rein into a knot around a swinging tree branch, slipped to the ground without a telltale

creak from saddle leather or stirrups, and went creeping through the now thickety yard toward the light.

That which Dolliver saw when he peered in at the window made a tight, grim line of his silky bearded mouth. Near a tallow dip on the floor sat Bunce and Ab Hatton and two of their uncouth cousins, ready for an all-night orgy of drinking and gambling. Bunce Hatton set out a soiled pack of cards, and began to jingle silver money eagerly in the other hand.

"Cut fer deal, Ranse," he said. "Dave, podner, pass the jug around."

The giant figure of Pip Hatton, the shatterpate, emerged from the shadows at the clink of coins. He whined:

"Bunce, gi' me a nickel!"

"Aw, go to hell, Pip," Bunce replied caressingly. "Hit's bad luck to give anybody money durin' a cyard game. The jug, Dave, podner."

As Ransom Torrey bent forward to cut the pack, Dolliver went into swift action. Across the window sill his revolvers spat flame, and lead, and smoke with a tremendous, crashing roar—one bullet wiped the fire from a cigarette in Ab Hatton's mouth; another sent the cards flying in the air; still another left only the handle of a jug hanging from Dave Tressler's finger; yet another drove the candle spinning, and plunged the musty log-walled room into pitchy darkness that was acrid with the fumes of exploded gunpowder.

"The regards o' Jack the Cleaner," came in a rich baritone drawl from the thickety yard.

OLD Busby Hatton had kindled a small fire for the purpose of baking out his rheumatism. From the fire, he lighted both his pipe and a very dirty oil lamp on the mantel above. Then he dropped into a homemade rocker that was lined with the untanned hide of a stolen sheep.

The slattern wife of Sink Hatton

entered the cabin, with a gallon crock almost full of new corn-sugar-potash whisky, a kind that kills at a great deal less than forty yards. Straight to Old Buz she went, smirking.

He took a greasy tin cup from the unswept floor, dipped it into the crock, and drank the vitriolic stuff without so much as a grimace. Herein lay the pride of the Hattons.

A small boy appeared as though from nowhere at all, and tugged at the woman's skirt.

"Maw, gi' me a drink," he ordered, rather than asked.

"Hain't you done had a drink to-night, Hezekiah?" she giggled.

The boy frowned mannishly. "Yes, maw, but I want another un."

She gave it to him. He, too, drank without a grimace.

"You little devil!" cooed his mother. "What a man you'll make!"

She left crock and tin cup on the floor, within easy reach of her father-in-law, and went traipsing into the lean-to kitchen. Old Hatton stopped puffing at his pipe and cocked an ear. He had heard the whine of a dog that was being throttled in the hands of a strong man.

The next instant there was a voice from a half-open window:

"Listen, Buz. Jack the Cleaner is a-talkin' to you now. The law cain't seem to regilate yore low-down outfit, and I have decided to do the regilatin' myself, and she shore will be done right when I'm through. This here valley is still Ledford's Laurel, by godlings, and not Hell's Kitchen.

"You've burnt yore last burn, stole yore last steal, and killed yore last kill, here in this valley. I'm a-givin' you forty-eight hours to leave Ledford's Laurel, you and yore outfit, lock, stock, ramrod, barrel and sights. To show you that I mean ezzackly what I say, I will now leave you my very kindest regards——"

Cra-a-a-a-a-a-ash!

Four shots blended into a deafening blast that shook the primitive house. The tin cup jumped into the fire, the gallon crock crumbled into wet pieces on the dirty floor, Busby Hatton had no pipe in his hand, and the chimney was gone from the lamp on the mantel.

The villainous old mountaineer hoodlum seized a rifle, hastened outside swearing, and almost fell over the body of a hound that was just coming back to life. Jack Dolliver had wished that it were not necessary to choke that poor dog.

CHAPTER III.

ECHOING RIFLES.

IN the Faidley home, at a window of her upstairs bedroom, Sally Emmaline sat thrnking—thinking, until the moon had reached its zenith. On her lap lay an old, and faded, and coverless book that she had taken from the John Ledford house years before, when the family had been broken up by death and the lure of Texas. On the births' page of the book, scrawled in ink that now was faded and dim, was the name of Little Red Fox's father.

Almost before the rising sun had cleared the upper ramparts of Smoky Thunder Mountain on the morning following the shooting, Busby Hatton and his sons, with two Torreys and a Tressler, appeared at the Faidley gate. They were armed, as usual. Old Buz hallooed angrily.

Thurston Faidley answered from the front porch.

"Whar is that furriner?" demanded Bunce Hatton. He was usurping the place of his father, the place of chief of the ruffians who called themselves a clan.

"I don't know, Bunce," Grandpap Thurst said quietly. "He rid away from here last night, not long atter supper, and we ain't seen him sence."

"Ef you don't want to be burnt out, you shore better tell us the truth," snarled Sink Hatton.

Faidley combed his white beard with unsteady fingers. "You know I don't never lie, Sinclair."

Bunce Hatton muttered something to the others, jerked his rifle into the crook of his arm, and went slouching up to the porch.

"Who is that furriner, Thurst?" he growled. Although his repeater still lay in the crook of his arm, the barrel now was turned straight toward the old mountaineer, and the hammer was back and a finger curved over the trigger.

Before Faidley could speak, the voice of a boy came half whispering from an open window behind him and to his left: "Bunce, you move that rifle gun offen grandpap, or I wisht I may drap dead ef I don't shoot you!"

The Hatton paled under his scraggly beard as he looked into the muzzle of the Faidley rifle in the hands of Little Red Fox. At once he dropped the butt of his own weapon to the ground at his feet. He guessed that the lad would keep his word, and it was by no means a poor guess.

Old Thurst explained with admirable calm: "The furriner is Jack Dolliver. He's from Kaintucky and a friend to Scrapper Ledford, he said."

At the name, Ledford, Bunce Hatton's opaque black eyes glittered. "Reckon we'd run from one man? No, i-god. He's too bumbly brash and brigaty. Ef we ketches him, we'll hang him. Whar's Sally Emmaline at?"

Faidley merely shook his head, and Hatton reluctantly went back to his kinsmen at the gate. When the dangerous visitors had gone, Sally Emmaline took the rifle from the boy's hands and put it across a bed.

Suddenly Little Red Fox pointed toward the dining-room doorway and exclaimed softly: "Mr. Jack!"

Dolliver smiled, then spoke to Faid-

ley, who had just come in: "I wanted to be nigh, a-fearin' trouble. I found a old empty cabin which'll make good headqawters fer me. I'd draw bullets, ef I stayed here now."

"I'm a-thinkin' you've bit off a heap," Faidley said uneasily.

"Mebbe so, and hit's up to me to dy-gest whatever I've bit off," replied Dolliver. "Well, I must overtake them hounds and tell 'em somethin' I had ort to told 'em last night." So long!"

Dolliver had left his horse cropping grass in the orchard behind the barn. Soon he was again in the saddle, and off like a streak.

Where the rough road turned sharply around a great boulder, Old Buz Hatton and his men, walking, unwisely, in a group, found themselves facing Jack Dolliver's two revolvers at close range. Dolliver sat his horse like a statue, motionless. The group froze in its tracks.

"Listen," began the horseman. "Hit'll be a sight better fer you-all to leave Ledford's Laurel quietlike. I hate the thought o' widders and orphans. She don't set well with me, the thought o' widders and orphans. That's all I got to say, and now you can be a-cooterin' along home."

As they passed him, each gave him a dagger look of insensate hatred, and he realized that his good impulse was lost.

There was dreamer blood, as well as dashing blood, in this man. A few minutes of concentration, while the Hatton gang won distance from him; then:

Sput!—Ping!—and the keen thunder of Bunce Hatton's rifle came just after the leaden messenger bit at Dolliver's beard, flattened on stone, and went singing off in a high arc.

Dolliver was out of his saddle instantly. He slapped the horse with his hat and darted for the shelter of the boulder. The horse galloped away northward on the road.

Dolliver saw he was in a trap of his

own making. The Hatton gang was not within revolver range, while he was well within the range of their rifles. Their numbers would enable them to get at all sides of his shelter. If he ran he would be shot; and they would eventually shoot him if he kept to the boulder!

He peered around a corner. Already they had deployed and were moving swiftly to surround him at rifle-shot distance. And then—like a jinni out of a magician's box—the giant imbecile, Pip Hatton, appeared on the other side of the road from Dolliver! Pip carried his unloaded rifle as lightly as though it were a straw.

"Mister, gi' me a nickel!" he whined.

Dolliver produced a five-cent piece, the one denomination of money that the shatterpate knew. Smirking like a delighted Brobdignagian child, Pip Hatton lumbered across the road. That nickel would buy pretty red candy—and in exchange for it the stranger in black got Pip's old rifle, and a fighting chance! Had his life not been at stake, Jack Dolliver would have looked upon this as an unfair advantage, certainly.

Busby Hatton had been yelling at his huge son, to no avail. Pip hurried toward a crossroads store miles away. Dolliver, who had seen that his own cartridges would fit the repeater, threw aside his revolvers and began to cram the repeater's magazine. Soon the incircling enemy was being lead-raked from the boulder. It was an old fire scald, with only clumps of scrub for cover.

Sink Hatton and Dave Tressler, wounded badly, crawled off homeward.

The others quickened their pace and became more difficult as targets. They fired back, but the man in the trap kept shooting.

Only three of the mountaineers had not crawled off homeward when their strategic points were reached. Dol-

liver had hastily gathered loose stones into a barricade that was all too low. He now lay behind it.

The real battle began. The thunder of rifles rang and rang, echoed again and again. Ransom Torrey and the two Hattons were wounded more than once, and so was Jack Dolliver.

Then Dolliver's firing ceased. Just when he felt that victory was not so far away, he had found that he had but three cartridges left!

The enemy took heart. Bunce Hatton's thin shelter of laurel became like a machine-gun nest. Dolliver lay low and waited; his last cartridges must count. He peered again between lead-marked stones. A bullet scored his forehead, and blood ran into his eyes. He swore, and dashed it out. He was faint. What was that coming?—Bunce Hatton, on his blue-grass horse!

It wasn't Bunce Hatton. Like a cannon ball the black came on. Inside the barricade dropped a figure that carried a rifle and a full belt of cartridges—Sally Emmaline Faidley! Those who were left of the slow-thinking Hatton gang realized it too late.

"Down plum' flat!" gasped Dolliver. "Gi' me that gun and ca'tridges!"

"I can shoot," she told him, her eyes ablaze. "I'll fight with you."

It stiffened him amazingly. He took the Faidley rifle and the ammunition from her, and the barricade at once began to deliver a galling, withering stream of fire. Then Dolliver saw that the enemy was fleeing, whipped, eternally whipped.

He heard himself mumble to the soldier woman beside him: "Boy, watch 'em skin out—by godlings, watch 'em!" He staggered erect, disheveled and dust stained, torn and bleeding, but triumphant, and sent his parting shot in words: "The regards o' Jack the Cleaner!"

Sally Emmaline caught the horse and helped him into the saddle. She led

the horse to her home. Shortly after that, Dolliver let go of everything:

It was noon of the next day before he knew very much. He was abed in the company bedroom of the Faidleys, and with him was the low-country doctor that old Faidley had brought. Dolliver saw that he was half covered with bandages, and yet, he wanted to get up.

The doctor objected: "Not yet. You're shot right bad, though you'll make it with care. The Hattons? Gone, the whole business of them, hauling their wounded in wagons. The sheriff told me. I phoned him from my house, and he's out here now. He wishes to make you a deputy. Remember, don't stir too much, Mr. Dolliver."

The doctor left the room for a conversation with Grandpap Thurst. Sally Emmaline appeared at the bedside with Little Red Fox.

It was then that the patient's mind cleared fully. He blurted: "A woman which tried to fight with me! I want

to marry you, Sally. I been a fool long enough. I been such a fool, and I was so ashamed o' hit, that I even lied abouten myself. Sally, I'm Scrapper Ledford."

"Yeuh, and I've done fergived you, pap," said the bright-eyed boy.

Sally Emmaline smiled. She wanted to kiss his wounds. "I knowed you, Scrapper, beard and all. And then, yore fust name, Dolliver, which nobody remembered, was wrote in the book. You never lied about that, anyhow. Mebbe you never lied a-tall. Mebbe the old Scrapper Ledford is dead. I—I'd marry you, ef only you liked me—that a way."

"When you've loved my baby so much, me not like you that a way? Sally——"

He couldn't say more. But there was no need to say more. With one bandaged arm he reached for his boy, and with the other he reached for the soldier woman. He got them both.



TRAVELING SOME!

THE flight of the airplane *Question Mark*, which hung up an endurance record of one hundred and fifty hours, forty minutes, and fifteen seconds—more than six and a quarter days—was primarily a test of the machine's motor, for the plane could stay aloft only as long as the motors performed satisfactorily.

An airplane propeller makes about one thousand and six hundred revolutions a minute. This means that each piston in the motor makes twice that number of strokes—three thousand and two hundred a minute. There were twenty-seven pistons in the three motors of the *Question Mark*.

Get out a pencil and a piece of paper. How many strokes did all the pistons in this plane's motors make? The correct answer is five million one hundred and eighty-four thousand. Now multiply this figure by the number of hours the *Question Mark* stayed aloft.

With each stroke, every piston moved five and one half inches. How far, then, did these twenty-seven pistons move in an hour? Here's a chance to see how good you are at figuring. Convert the inches into miles. How many miles? The answer is about four hundred and forty-nine miles an hour.

The tip of each of the plane's propellers travels four hundred and eighty-seven miles an hour. There are three propellers on the plane, one connected with each motor. The *Question Mark* stayed aloft more than one hundred and fifty hours. How many miles did the tips of the propellers travel? Ask some one else to figure this problem, and see if your answers agree.



Tropical Vacuum

By Gregor Ziemer

COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

CHAPTER I.

BREWING TROUBLE.

LARKIN crossed the bit of hot sand between his well-appointed office and the sugar central with a grim look of determination on his somewhat arrogant face. It was a hot January afternoon. He hurried to get out of the sun for he was still unaccustomed to its direct rays.

He was cleanly shaven, and meticulously dressed in a Canton-silk suit of rich molave brown, with States shoes to match. Larkin hated the carelessness of dress betrayed by old sugar-central men.

He entered the clattering central. Felipe, the half-caste overseer assistant, approached silently, his face, more

white than brown, oozing humbleness. He was a handsome fellow, apparently utterly devoted to Larkin—but there was something about him, something that every white man who knows natives knows how to interpret.

"Felipe hates whites," read the message in his slit eyes. His slender face was not quite as able as that of a native to cover emotions. But it was a message that only the initiated could detect.

"Something I can do for Mr. Larkin?" Felipe asked.

"Yes. I'm ready. See that vacuum tank No. 1 is emptied as soon as possible. And go call Mr. Addinbrook."

Smiling ingratiatingly, the assistant hurried off.

Larkin climbed the iron ladder of the skeleton platform that carried the huge,

cylindrical vacuum boilers, and peered through the glass portholes of No. 1. A seething mass of cane juice was bubbling under high vacuum.

Above the medley of noises all about, there was the hollow, sepulchral throb of the air pump that created the vacuum. There was about the sound something sinister, something weird. Larkin heard it and nodded.

There was a hard look in his eyes as he turned and glanced through the open shutters over the fields of waving cane that filled every nook and cranny of the narrow coastal plain. Back of the fields rose the hills, home of the aborigines of the island—unconverted dwarf Negritos.

Larkin's plantation was the only one on the whole tropical island—except one that now belonged to a beach comber, and wasn't run in a modern way. Settlements were not numerous on Cuyo, for the little bow-and-arrow Negritos discouraged strangers.

Attempts had been made to bring government to the Negritos, but the converted Filipinos that attempted it had been killed. They were diminutive, these aborigines, not more than four feet tall, with curly hair. But they were quick, clannish, and resented subjection of any sort. They had the habit of coming down to the coastal plain to build small rice paddies, deserting them when the crop was harvested. Otherwise no one ever saw them.

"I'll teach them so they'll remember it," Larkin remarked to himself. "Felipe certainly has the right idea." He descended the stairs. A house boy brought a camp stool, and covered it with a small Filipino mat. Larkin sat down to wait for his plantation manager.

"I'll teach them," he repeated. "They're getting absolutely obnoxious. They want me to pay them for their land. Pay them!"

For the first two months of Larkin's

superintendency of the Cuyo, everything had been quiet until he had ordered his planters to annex the newly cleared rice fields they had found at the foot of the mountains—Negrito rice fields. The aborigines had apparently withdrawn. Larkin had pushed on and found more and more fields, until the whole coastal plain was his. For a while it seemed as if the Negritos were afraid of the rifles in the hands of the watchmen.

Then, unexpectedly, three frowsy-haired, muscular little dwarfs had come to the office, and asked for sugar as payment for their land. They would be willing to exchange their land for a hundred and fifty bags of sugar annually. Otherwise there would be trouble.

Felipe had acted as interpreter. He was told to tell the Negritos that the superintendent had no intentions of paying for land to which the little men had no more title than he—that he was not used to dealing with bushmen. Then Larkin had them whipped.

The following week, fifty sacks of sugar were stolen—and fifty the next, and three guards shot to death with Negrito arrows. Then Larkin laid a trap, and captured two of the thieves. Now he was about to give the tribe a lesson that would put an end to thieving, and the idea of payment for land. How the lesson was to be administered was suggested by Felipe.

Some vague hint of what Larkin intended to do must have leaked out. The Filipino workers all over the mill were excited—chattering in high-strung falsetto tones. When the native sugar boiler peeped into No. 1, and let the thickened cane juice flow to the next unit, he trembled perceptibly. Furtively two taos came stealing up, and began to pry open the small door of the tank.

At intervals peculiarly penetrating cries came from the small tool shed over in one corner near the dynamo.

A slight shuffle told the superintendent that his manager was coming. The working taos had succeeded in getting the door of No. 1 open. Larkin grinned. He wanted Addinbrook to see it that way.

The manager came nearer, wiping his bare arms with cane pulp. He was walking with his head bowed, as if he were worried. His forehead was alive with frowns, and he was chewing the left corner of his mouth—a gesture that indicated that he was distressed about something.

Addinbrook was a giant of a man, a bit uncouth and without any of the suavity that marked Larkin, but he was frank and wholesome. His skin was a queer yellowish brown from perpetual sweating. He had been in tropic latitudes for many years. Apparently he had just come in from inspecting outlying fields, for he wore a holster and a gun.

Addinbrook unbuckled the gun belt and let it fall to the cement floor. "Much better off without that. Only makes trouble," he said, nodding a greeting to his employer.

"Prevents it, too," asserted Larkin.

Swallowing a retort, Addinbrook took off his sun helmet, and threw it down.

"Ran across a bunch of Negritos in a clearing over by the Siasi River. They jumped in and swam under water when they saw me. Seemed terribly worked up about something. Wish they'd let me get close enough to talk to them."

"Excited, were they? I'll give them something to get excited about," said Larkin.

"You referring to the prisoners? What are you going to do with them brown boys?"

Larkin laughed unpleasantly. "I suppose you think I'm going to send them home with fifty more bags of sugar, to make up the quota they asked for, and give them my blessing?"

"Never mind the blessing. But I'd sure give 'em the sugar. It's just as good not to get the wild fellows down on the mill, and us few whites."

"I'll give them sugar, all right. At least I'll put them very close to the place where sugar comes from. And then they can go home."

There was a twitch to the corners of Larkin's mouth. It vanished temporarily as he saw Addinbrook start. The manager must have seen the open door of No. 1. The lines on his forehead deepened. For a while he refrained from speaking.

"Well, I'm glad to hear you're going to turn 'em loose, Mr. Larkin," Addinbrook said finally. "They're scared good and proper as it is, and there'll be no more thievin' if they get back to their tribe all right. I've talked to 'em. Just kids. Somebody egged them into this."

Addinbrook looked for Felipe. He was busy giving a word beating to some workers.

"They'll soon have something to talk about," said Larkin quietly.

CHAPTER II.

WEIRD TORTURE.

ADDINBROOK let his canvas shoes play nervously with a piece of cane. He threw another glance at the vacuum tank overhead.

"You—you ain't goin' to put 'em in there, and put the vacuum on 'em, are you?"

"Oh, I'll give them a little idea of how complicated a process sugar making is," replied Larkin grinning at his manager, whose face now revealed horror.

"I heard Felipe suggested for you to do this, but I thought sure you wouldn't listen to the brown hypocrite. That fellow's waiting to start something. Better go easy, or you'll pull a cloudburst of trouble down on the mill."

"Felipe! What have you against Felipe anyway?" asked Larkin tartly. "I know whom I can trust and whom not. Felipe's way of treating the workers with iron gloves meets with my approval. I'd trust Felipe with anything."

Addinbrook lowered his voice. "I wouldn't say this if I weren't sure. But after you've been here as long as I have, you'll be able to read these fellows better. That Felipe's playin' some kind of game, don't know just what. He's playin' for high stakes. I've watched him. If I'm not mistaken, he's aimin' to get at one swipe what it took ten whites to build up in more months than he can count. He's after the mill.

"You're playin' with fire, and you don't know it. If you can't see that an act like you're contemplatin' would be just about the thing he's waitin' for, I can't advise you none. I'd lay off that funny business with the vacuum. That kind of punishment never did get a man anywhere, out here."

Larkin got red in the face. "Thanks," he said coldly. "I know what I'm about. I think I know the tropics well enough to govern my actions. And I know Felipe. When these brown devils get back to their tribe men, they'll counsel them to lay off my plant."

Addinbrook rocked on his haunches. "Wrong track," he said laconically.

Larkin's eyes snapped with anger. "And I've listened to your kind of advice long enough. You pretend you know natives——"

"Pretend!" It was the manager's turn to flare up. "I'm not pretendin'. I know these Negritos, and I know that fellow, Felipe. You won't listen to me. As a result you'll have the whole nest about your ears, and Felipe will be on the winning side, believe me. You drove the brown boys off with whips, 'stead of givin' them a little sugar you

wouldn't miss. Now you're goin' to do something worse. All right. Go ahead. It's your central."

"Glad to hear you still admit that," mocked Larkin, showing his teeth in another grin.

"What good does it do to get them all antagonistic?" continued Addinbrook. "Too many of 'em. And if they ever come down, these converted Filipinos we got here will up and run. They're jumpy now. Had to force the planters into that clearing this morning. Scared to death of them little bow-and-arrow men. If you knew Negritos, you'd understand. This vacuum business will sure set off a fuse somewhere."

"Well, what's your suggestion?"

"Let those two boys go, and drive that fellow Felipe out of the Islands."

"I'll let them go after they've seen the inside of that vacuum tank."

Addinbrook got to his feet, unable longer to control himself. "Show 'em the inside of 'a vacuum tank, with the vacuum pullin' the tongues out of their chokin' throats. All right. Go ahead. But I'm not going to have any hand in it. And I'm not going to stay with the Cuyo, spite of contract, if this thing is pulled off."

"As you wish, Addinbrook. Going back to your little native plantation with the two-by-four patch of cane? As you wish. But this is my central, and I'll run it as I see fit."

Addinbrook put on his helmet, and reached for his belt. "Suits me. Trouble with you, Mr. Larkin, you've been here four months, and you act as if you know all that's to be known about these tropics. But you can't torture these natives and get away with it. You'd do a lot better to go easy at first, till you know how to handle 'em better, and get to know half-breeds. I've been here fifteen years and never had trouble."

"Because you're afraid of it," re-

torted Larkin. "You're afraid of these bow-and-arrow men. You'd rather talk peace to 'em. Peace talk to bushmen! And as for Felipe, are you afraid he's handling the natives better than you?"

Addinbrook remained calm. "I'm not afraid, and I'm not jealous as you seem to think. You hired me to manage the central for you, and I did the best I could. The natives know me, and sort of respect me now. But they won't if I back this cruel business."

"A fine affair when a white man prefers natives to whites."

"I don't prefer natives to whites. But I know how these Negritos feel about things. They reason like the kids they are. They were here first. They needed part of the plain to raise their rice. You took their land."

"They always heard us old-timers say the whites were just. They come to see you, and you act worse than any of them would. And you're going to act worse still. A white man ought to teach these fellows fairness and justice, and how to reason things out, instead of cruelty and thievin'. After all, if they steal our sugar, we stole their land."

"That'll do, Addinbrook," snapped Larkin. "This land doesn't belong to them any more than to me. I intend to keep it. And I'll punish these fellows so they won't ever forget about it."

"You'll learn some day," said Addinbrook, moving off, "if you live long enough. Many of 'em act like this when they first come out, but most of them get over it quicker than you." He walked over to the furnace, picked up an old moldy raincoat, and disappeared on his way to his nipa hut.

From behind a storage tank Felipe watched the disappearing manager, and grinned triumphantly.

A moment later Larkin called him, and gave him an order. Then he sat down to smoke a Manila cigar. "I'll make Felipe manager," he muttered.

"Any fool can see he's loyal. And he gets work out of these lazy natives."

WHEN his cigar was finished, Larkin climbed to the platform on which were the barrellike boilers, lined with asbestos, and reënforced with a hull of wooden staves.

A deadly silence fell over the workers as presently two small, pug-nosed, woolly-haired brown figures, tied together, were shoved up the ladder. Their ropes were cut, and they stood silent and trembling, staring at the white man with flickering, watchful eyes.

At a gesture from Larkin they were seized, and roughly forced through the small iron door of the hollow tank. The door was closed.

Larkin did not see the brooding hatred mingled with triumph on Felipe's face. The white man stepped to the glass porthole of the tank. A light inside showed the two boys standing like brown statues, frozen with fright, their eyes rolling wildly. He went to a small wheel, and turned on the vacuum slightly, so as to exhaust the air inside very gradually.

"We'll cut off a bit of the air you're used to," said Larkin darkly. "After that, maybe you brown devils will stay where there's lots of it."

Larkin turned on the vacuum a bit more.

The hollow throb of the air pump sounded like the drumbeats of doom, through the central. Larkin stepped to the porthole. The two boys inside were getting uneasy, chattering to each other with trembling lips, looking about nervously. Then one reached for his throat. The other ran to the port, sank on his knees, and began to claw at the glass with reaching hands.

"Don't like it so well, eh?" gloated Larkin. "You'll know the feeling of a man with a rope around his neck, anyway. If you survive it, you can

go home. I guess maybe you'll stay there."

Inside the tank, panic was taking possession of the two victims, as the air became rarified. They threw themselves down, clawed the floor wildly, jumped up, and beat their breasts with their fists, their tongues lolling. Then one of them fell down and stayed there. The other was apparently shrieking, but no sound came through the thick walls.

Larkin nodded to Felipe, who was standing at the head of the ladder, and turned off the vacuum. Three men jerked open the door, which resisted their pull tenaciously.

"Take them out. Let them lie until they revive," ordered Larkin. "They'll come to eventually. And they'll drag themselves home, wiser and better Negritos."

Without looking back at the two gasping figures, Larkin walked down the ladder and to his office, where he ordered a strong drink.

After a time, Addinbrook came down the corral path. He was making no efforts to conceal his disgust. He stopped at the foot of the sala stairs. "Here are the reports on the run, so far," he said, handing over some accounting sheets. "I'm leaving."

"Give the reports to Felipe," said Larkin without looking up. "And when you leave don't go away thinking I did something I didn't have the right to do. I could have killed these fellows, and been within my rights as administrator of this island."

"Yes, yes," answered Addinbrook impatiently. "You almost did kill 'em. Anyway I'll have nothing to do with it. Some day when you find out that your way of handling them isn't quite right, and that Felipe isn't what he seems, let me know."

Larkin laughed a secure, sneering laugh. "Thanks, Addinbrook. If I ever need your help in handling these

natives, I'll send them twice the number of bags of sugar they asked for." He devoted his attention to his drink.

CHAPTER III.

PAYMENT IN KIND.

WITHOUT looking either to right or left Addinbrook turned his back on Larkin, and walked toward the mill. It was humming like a huge clock. The crushers crunched their endless way through juicy pulp, the huge Corliss wheel whirled majestically, and the centrifugals sang their high-pitched song.

A look of pain stole into the manager's clear eyes. He hated to leave more than he dared admit to himself.

The future was vague. Ten kilometers away was the other sugar central of the island—with a carabao oxen mill instead of crushers, and an old-fashioned Spanish evaporating system. It used to be his. He had given the thing to an old beach-comber friend, Clancy.

He'd have to go back to it for a while.

Addinbrook walked down the narrow-gauge sugar railway to the hard-packed shore, worked his way around half a dozen promontories, and found a familiar orchid-hung path that brought him out on a flat, hill-cradled valley, covered with sugar cane. In the center of it was the high-peaked nipa hut of the manager. It was getting dark; a fire was smoldering under some coconut trees. Clancy was standing by the fire.

"'Lo, Clancy," Addinbrook greeted him. "I've come back for a spell. Can you put me up?"

"That you, Addinbrook?" asked Clancy, who was tall and sparse, with red stubble all over his face. "Sure I can put you up. Your hammock's in the corner, and this *lechón* and rice will be ready in a minute. Thought you'd

come sooner or later. Heard all about it. Pretty serious, eh?"

"Bad enough so I quit my job. Larkin's having growing pains. But I'd rather not talk about it, Clancy."

"Of course you don't want to talk about it," said Clancy, with that half-philosophic, half-furtive look of the man who had missed too many boats, and knows it. "Well, I won't have to tell you what to do. Just do what you please around here."

The next morning Addinbrook went back to his old job of supervising the boiling in the open kettles. He tried not to think of the other central. He didn't succeed very well, especially when the word came that night that Larkin had left for the provincial capital of the next island, apparently to get payment for his last sugar shipment. Felipe was left in charge.

"I hate to think of good decent machinery in the care of that fellow who don't know what natural laws are," Addinbrook muttered fiercely to himself when he heard about it.

That night there was a heavy monsoon, and rain squalls. The surf was running high and noisily. Clancy did not hear Addinbrook leave his hammock stealthily about midnight, nor did he hear him come back.

It rained for four days, and there was little work among the cane. Some of the boys went over to the much-admired central to hobnob with relatives. Addinbrook guessed that there were many family councils, because of the growing feeling of insecurity that was spreading over the mill.

Then one day came the news that Larkin was back.

THAT afternoon Addinbrook buckled on his belt, and disappeared in the direction of the hills. He came back about ten that night, from the direction of the mill. Clancy was asleep. Addinbrook shook him.

"Clancy," he said. "I want you to come over with me to the central. I've got reasons to think that something is going to happen to-night. Saw a group of Negritos—and at their head was our friend Felipe. We may not be able to do anything, but I want to see what's happening, anyway."

They reached the mill an hour later, approaching it from the rear, crawling on their bellies. Behind a huge exterior storage tank they stopped. The mill was quiet.

"We're on time," whispered Addinbrook.

For the next half hour the mill remained quiet. Clancy was getting restless. But just as Addinbrook was beginning to wonder if things were really going to happen as he had anticipated, there was the sound of pattering feet, and a light was switched on.

"Don't be surprised at anything," whispered the former manager. "And for Pete's sake don't try to stop anybody from doing anything. There are too many of them, and their poisoned arrows work deucedly quick."

Through a crack in the iron sheeting, they saw a figure approach the air pump. It was Felipe—but no longer humble. He was fierce and stealthy—a jungle tiger.

He bent over the pump. The next moment a dull chugging sound throbbed through the night.

"Just as I thought," hissed Addinbrook. "They're going to bring in somebody we know now." He lapsed into silence.

Suddenly there was a wild scramble over on the opposite side of the mill. "Look at 'em come," whispered Clancy hoarsely, as more than a hundred Negritos came milling in. "They've got him! They've got Larkin." Clancy's voice shook with emotion.

"I warned him," answered Addinbrook, laying a restraining hand on the old beach comber.

A SQUIRMING, madly cursing figure bound hand and foot was carried up the ladder to the vacuum tank. Addinbrook could see that the door of the tank was open.

"Just like natives," he whispered. "Using No. 1. Their idea of justice. Punishing him with the same tank he used."

"But, man," chattered Clancy, "they've got Larkin. They're going to put him in that tank, and they'll kill him in no time. You're not going to allow them to do that——" Clancy was incredulous.

The hand on his shoulder gripped harder. "Careful, or they'll hear, and there will be the deuce to pay. Take your time."

Larkin, his clothes torn, loathing and horror on his face, was standing by the huge cylinder. Beside him stood Felipe, gloating, triumphant. Below squatted the small, weird forms of the aborigines. Felipe raised his hand. The customary speech, which is never absent from any Filipino festivity, was about to be delivered.

Felipe was in his glory. His gestures were magnificent. His voice exuberant.

"Now you, Mr. Larkin," he shouted, "we the victors on this event, we give you yet your choice. You write paper, whereby mill it become all property of Felipe, so he make sugar for Negritos, or else it is we put you where was put the Negritos. Answer, and I do interpret. We are waiting."

Larkin writhed like a madman in a strait-jacket. "Before I sign any paper I'll see you in hell first, you lying hypocrite."

The half-breed lashed out and struck the white man a blow across the mouth. "Better it is you change your mind only," he said.

"Go to hell," snarled Larkin. "Never."

Felipe hesitated a moment, frowned,

and recovered himself. He turned to the Negritos. Addinbrook heard him interpret what Larkin had said. There was a wild chorus of howls. Then, urged on by stinging words from Felipe, the Negritos came swarming up the ladder.

Larkin was surrounded by dozens of shiny bodies. The next thing Addinbrook saw was that the door of the tank was closed. The natives climbed down and started a war dance.

Clancy gripped Addinbrook's arm. "But man, man! You can't let 'em do that. You can't! The vacuum's on, don't you understand? Listen to that pump! You can't let 'em do that——"

"It's the only way to quiet 'em down, Clancy. You know 'em well enough for that. If it weren't for that half-breed they'd go now, satisfied. They've taken their revenge. But it looks as if that hombre has something else up his sleeve. Listen."

Felipe was talking. He was quieting the Negritos with honeyed words. He talked in dialect, but both listeners understood him.

Larkin refused to give them the mill, the half-breed was saying. It would be impossible to keep it unless there was a paper signed by Larkin. The other white men would not allow it. So he suggested that they wait until he went over to the office of the superintendent, and get all the white man's money.

And then they'd all join in and destroy the white man's mill, as a warning to other white men. In five minutes he would be back. He'd get the money. He had the keys.

Felipe met with unexpected opposition. The old chief, the leader, raised an objection. He saw no sense in staying any longer. They had accomplished what they had come for.

But Felipe talked him down. And it was soon evident that he had power over these simple fellows. They promised to wait until he came back. But

the old chief warned him to hurry. He was anxious to get away from that place.

CHAPTER IV.

MENACING POISON.

ADDINBROOK had listened to Felipe's suggestion of demolishing the mill, with gritting teeth.

"That filthy half-and-half!" he exclaimed under his breath. "Going to wreck the mill it took me four months to put up. The hypocrite. I'm going to settle with that hombre right here and now. You stay here, Clancy. If we can get rid of Felipe, I think we can reason with these fellows.

"I'll talk to 'em. Watch me. When I stamp my foot, I want you to make all the noise you can, yell out orders, and shoot your gun. But don't hit anybody, or there will be the devil to pay. Now, I'm going after Felipe."

"But, Addinbrook, Larkin——"

"He thought he knew all about the tropics. If he could have seen and heard Felipe the last few minutes, he might have changed his mind. But never mind. Stay where you are. It's not yet time to do anything."

Drawing his revolver, Addinbrook crossed over to the office, staying in the shadow of a row of bamboos. Through a half-open shutter of the superintendent's office he saw what he had expected—Felipe busy at the safe.

Felipe had managed to open it, and was taking out what he wanted. The room was dark except for a flash light the breed was holding. Once when he turned the light, Addinbrook saw that Felipe's gun was on the table behind him.

Silently Addinbrook stepped into the well-known room, turned the key in the heavy hardwood door, and switched on the light.

Felipe whirled like a panther.

Addinbrook covered him with his gun. Felipe made a move toward the

table. "Never mind the gun," snapped the white man. "Just came to have a little talk with you. Meanwhile, better hold up your hands."

Seeing himself foiled in a game that was going extraordinarily well, Felipe's black eyes became alive with hatred. Otherwise his face remained sullen.

"A man can't reason with you like he can with them simple natives," Addinbrook said, stepping to the table, and knocking the gun into a far corner.

"Better if you and I are alone. You always palmed yourself off as a white man, who knew how to knock the brown Filipinos about something awful. Now, suddenly, when there's something in it for you, you kill a white man, and say it's for the sake of the brown ones.

"Ain't very reasonable. If you want to call yourself a white man, you'll have to be judged by white man's standards. If you call yourself a native, you certainly deserve to be treated like the worst tao that ever lived. What you did to Larkin is all the worse, since you've got no excuse for it, like the Negritos have.

"Seems to me you're sort of out of luck, you sneaking lizard. Don't be long anywhere. Best thing I can do is to tie you up, take you to a white judge, and a brown fiscal, and let them fight it out. Afraid neither one would claim a piece of conceited jellyfish like you."

The taunts produced the desired effect. Felipe sprang into action. Addinbrook ducked like a flash, as a knife that the half-breed had carried somewhere about him came slashing through the air. It missed him by inches. The next moment Felipe leaped.

Addinbrook dropped his gun. He hadn't intended to use it. A shot would bring the whole brown tribe about his ears—a thing that had to be avoided.

"Going to fight, are you, you low-down mongoose?" chuckled Addin-

brook. "Good. Take that. That's what I keep in stock for white customers."

The charging Felipe was caught squarely on the jaw by a well-timed punch. It dropped him to his knees. But he took advantage of his position. The next moment he had ducked past the white man, a lightning hand flashed out, and Addinbrook felt his right arm jerked back.

"Native style, eh?" panted Addinbrook, a bit breathless from the excruciating pain. His left elbow swung back in a short quarter circle and struck Felipe squarely in the ribs, just as he was giving the captured arm another twist to break the bones. "I know that one. Take that. That's what I serve native customers."

Felipe grunted with pain, and lost his murderous hold. But he wasn't through. He dashed forward and recovered his knife—but too late.

"And this is what I always dish out to sneaky half-breeds," Addinbrook whistled through clenched teeth, and stepped in, too near for Felipe to throw his dangerous weapon.

Felipe made a wild stab at Addinbrook, but the latter's hand had crawled to his pocket, and before Felipe could direct a really serious blow, a handful of white powder bit his eyes.

"Unslacked lime," Addinbrook informed him. "Do you recognize it? We use it for purifyin' sugar juice. May do you some good. And while you're scratchin' at your eyes, I'll just sort of tie up your feet, eh?"

It was done in a moment. Then his hands were tied, and he was gagged, and Felipe was dumped in a corner.

"There you are," chuckled Addinbrook. "White, and brown, and half-and-half all neatly together to let you think over which you'd rather be from now on. A man's got to be consistent in the tropics or he upsets all laws.

But one thing is sure. *You'll* never wreck that mill, you master mechanic."

ADDINBROOK hurried back to the central. Boldly, fearlessly, he stepped into the center of the circle of squatting Negritos.

Every one of the little men got to his feet like a jack in a box. Every bow was trained on the white man. Quickly Addinbrook raised his hand for attention. He knew that his boast of knowing natives was about to be put through a cruel test. Not only his own fate hung in the balance, but the fate of the mill as well. Addinbrook didn't hesitate.

He talked fast—in dialect. The offending white man had been punished, he reminded the natives. Nobody would ever cause the Negritos trouble again. There was no use to stay here any longer. Felipe? Felipe had betrayed them. He had stolen all the white man's money, and left. He had no intentions of giving the brown brothers anything.

If the old chief would take the tribe back at once, there would be sent to their village a hundred bags of sugar, twice the amount asked for. And the quota would be sent every season, as long as the Cuyo used Negrito land.

But if they did not leave there would come constabulary soldiers—and there would be much fighting. The White Father of the Islands was anxious to see that the Negritos got justice, but he would not tolerate property destruction. Larkin was punished, the brown boys were avenged—a reward if they left, punishment if they didn't. It was all very simple.

The old chief, wrinkled and tattooed, once more squatted on his haunches. It was a good sign.

The white man was right, he admitted, but Felipe had promised much. He told them he'd be back in a few minutes. He thought it better they wait.

for him. Of course, if Felipe didn't come—

"Very well," said Addinbrook. "We shall wait. Felipe said he would return in five minutes. We shall wait three times as long."

The chief agreed.

It was a strange, weird fifteen minutes, with the air pump still throbbing, and the mysterious hot night lying heavy over the mill. But finally the chief stepped forward.

Addinbrook stamped his foot. Clancy must have watched the whole proceeding very closely. He was on the job. There was a wild series of shots, and somebody ordered constabulary soldiers to advance on the mill.

The old chief raised his hand. "It is good," he said, and advanced. "It is good. Felipe he does not come. We will go. The white man has promised sugar. The Negritos will wait."

A few sharp words, and in less than ten seconds not a native was in sight. Addinbrook knew there would be perfect peace for the Cuyo as long as the white man kept his promise.

CLANCY came in, white-faced, trembling.

"You saved the mill, Addinbrook, but you made no effort to save Larkin. Let's go and take him out, what's left of him."

Addinbrook was already on his way to the air pump. He shut off the engine. He ran up the stairs to tank No. 1, and opened the door, which seemed to come free easily.

While the trembling Clancy behaved as if he were seeing ghosts, there appeared at the door the ashen face of Larkin. There was horror written on his face, and incredulity, but he was alive—very much alive.

Clancy broke the unnatural silence that followed. "He—ain't dead? But the pump was goin' full blast. No human bein' can live in that tank for

more than a few minutes, and he's been in there nigh an hour."

"He could live in there quite a while the way it's fixed," said Addinbrook casually, without looking at Larkin. "I knew pretty well how the natives would act once Felipe got hold of them. I also guessed they'd use No. 1.

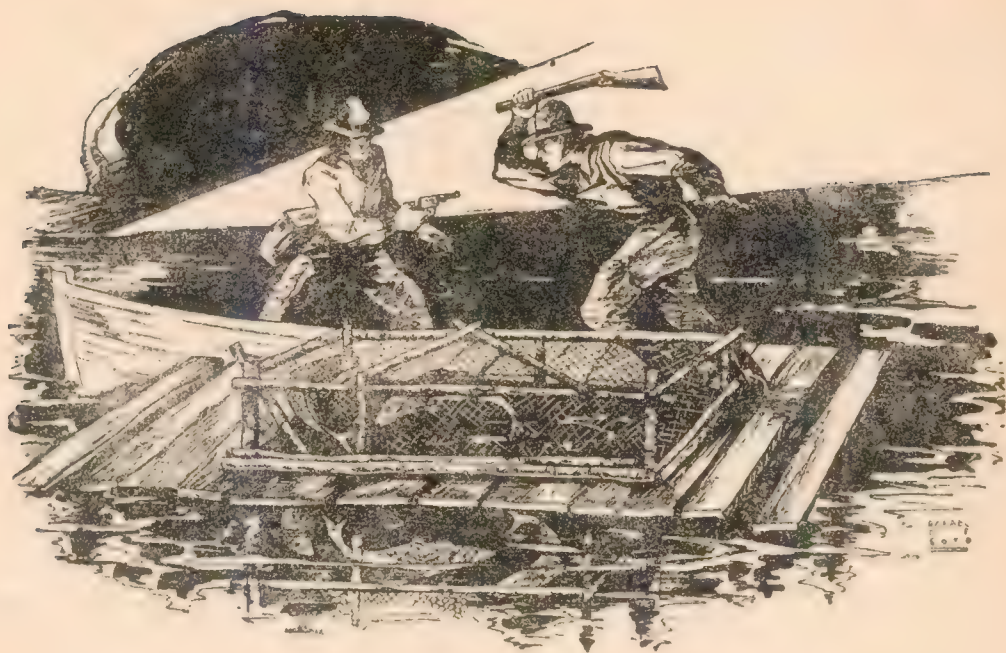
"I came back and opened a crack in the top of the tank where nobody noticed it. Plenty of air got in. And I guess, Clancy, that if Mr. Larkin sends the hundred bags of sugar he promised the Negritos, he'll never need my help in handling the natives again.

"Sorry, Clancy, that Mr. Larkin couldn't hear all that fellow Felipe said to the Negritos about him. But maybe he's changed his mind about Felipe anyway. Afraid he'll have to get a different manager, though, for Felipe is pretty badly done up from a safe-rifling job he undertook. I suggest he get somebody who knows how to handle natives without at the same time gettin' the white man into trouble." Addinbrook started to go.

Larkin gripped him with a trembling hand. "I—I have my—manager, if he'll accept," he said, a new humility, a new understanding, in his voice. "And I think he'll accept. He's still interested in this mill, I found that out. And—I'll expect him to give me a few more lessons—got to get next to the tropics. Seems they've got me stumped a bit. Will you stay, Addinbrook, and help me?"

Slowly Addinbrook turned. For a moment he hesitated. But what he saw on Larkin's face was enough to convince him that he was dealing with a different man.

His hand went out to grip that of the superintendent, while a bit of fog gathered in his throat. "Sure I'll stay, if you want me to," Addinbrook said simply. "Always dreamed of working with a man who would give the natives a square deal. I think I've found him."




After Midnight

By Kenneth Gilbert

COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

CHAPTER I.

FISH PIRATES.

OMETHING was wrong at Opalo Cove. Yet it was no secret, for every employee of the big salmon cannery there, from Superintendent Gresham down to the humblest packer, knew just what was wrong. They knew it had been a sad day for this industry, which had given them a living all these years, when old Jim Hathaway, who started with nothing and developed a two-million-dollar enterprise, died.

For, when Hathaway died, the harpies who had tried unsuccessfully to tear out his heart ever since the first piling of the Opalo Cove fish trap was

driven, knew their day had come. There was nobody who could carry on in the place of the old fighter who had gone.

Gresham, although capable, was not the man to do it. And there was nobody in Gresham's organization big enough to fill old Jim Hathaway's shoes.

"I'll admit it's too much for me," Gresham told Frayne, his assistant. "My authority's limited. Maybe it's just as well that it is, for it's probably too big a job for me. It's a job for a man like old Jim Hathaway himself, and Hathaway's gone!"

"And his son isn't a man!" affirmed Frayne. "At least, not what I'd call a man."

Gresham nodded. "That's just it," he agreed. "Young Hathaway, as the heir to old Jim, has the authority that we lack. There's nothing we can do but go ahead and hope for the best. But we'll be ruined at the end of this year, if we don't get a break.

"I've written young Hathaway letter after letter, telling him what's wrong, but he seems to be too busy playing polo, driving in auto races, or busting around in a speed boat, to pay attention. All I get is an evasive reply. He doesn't seem to understand that his fortune, everything that old Jim piled up for him, is being squandered in trying to beat these devils who are robbing us. Now that the enemy hasn't even stopped at murder——"

It was quite true. Old Pat McGee, night watchman at the big fish trap at Opalo Cove, had been found dead in his shack on the trap—and the trap had been robbed of between thirty and forty thousand fine sockeye salmon, worth a dollar apiece! The thing had happened a week ago.

Fish pirates had done the job, of course; fish pirates who *might* be in the pay of the big Samish Packing Co., bitterest rival of old Jim Hathaway when the latter was in his fighting prime. If the Samish Packing Co. could put Hathaway's concern out of business, it would be possible to get hold of the choice fish-trap site at Opalo Cove, and the modern cannery which employed a thousand persons.

In the dead of night the fish pirates had come, caught old Pat McGee unawares, killed him, and then cut away the wire webbing on one side of the fish-trap inclosure. Their boats had been backed up to this opening, and the salmon brailed out. When morning came, old Pat McGee was dead, and there were no salmon ready for the big cannery that day. Consequently, the plant had shut down until the repaired trap could gather more fish.

Losing money at the rate of thirty to forty thousand dollars at a time—and it was the fourth time that the trap had been robbed—it was easy to see what would happen to the Hathaway plant. True, old McGee had heretofore been merely overpowered and bound, or else knocked out by a blow from behind. This time, however, the pirates had not treated him so gently.

JIM HATHAWAY wouldn't rest until McGee's murderers were rounded up," went on Gresham. "He was fond of the old man, who had been with him all these years. But young Hathaway—— Well, I've never seen him—guess he's too good to come near us—but it's a cinch that *he* isn't the man to take hold of things here."

"McGee had a boy, too, didn't he?" put in Frayne. "Seems to me I heard that old Jim had taken an interest in him, and sent him to college, along with young Hathaway. Both of 'em——"

At that moment the bookkeeper came into Gresham's office, and announced a little excitedly:

"Young Mr. Hathaway has just arrived, sir! Wants to see you!"

Gresham and Frayne looked at each other for a moment; then the superintendent got to his feet. The next instant he was outside, offering his hand to a well-dressed young man who stood in the hall, looking about the office with a bored air.

"Mr. Hathaway?" exclaimed the superintendent deferentially. "I'm Gresham, the superintendent. Glad to see you here!"

The newcomer took Gresham's hand without particular enthusiasm, and then acknowledged the introduction of Frayne.

"Had a day to spare, so I thought I'd run up and look things over," remarked Hathaway easily. "May have to sit in this game, and take a hand myself. You've been having quite a

bit of trouble with fish pirates, I understand?"

For an instant Gresham's eyes gleamed, and he barely masked his scorn. This young fashion plate had taken a day off, to run up and look things over, when the fish trap and cannery were losing thousands of dollars! Hathaway might have to sit in this game!

Yet the official's voice, as he replied, was respectful enough. "A great deal of trouble, Mr. Hathaway," he said earnestly. "I only wish your father was here——" But he bit off the remark, as it sounded untactful.

"I'm mighty glad that you're here," Gresham went on. "I'm sure that you can be of great help to us!"

The latter remark was a bit malicious, and young Hathaway's eyes flickered for an instant, but apparently he decided to ignore it.

"Quite so," he agreed. "But I don't care to bother myself with details just now. I've only one request to make, and then I've got to run along back to town."

"And what is that, sir?" asked Gresham curiously.

"In my car outside is Jerry McGee," replied Hathaway. "We were together in college. He's the son of old Pat McGee, your trap watchman who was killed by the fish pirates. Mr. Hath—my dad was very fond of Jerry, and so am I. So I want to do something for him.

"I want you to give him the job of trap watchman, the position his father held!"

For a long moment Gresham looked at the other incredulously, as though doubting that he had heard aright.

"Give young McGee the job of watchman?" repeated Gresham. "Why, surely, Mr. Hathaway, you must be joking—or else you don't understand. Young McGee knows nothing about operating a big fish trap, like this.

It's a job that requires some experience.

"Besides, he's too young. It takes a *man*—er, that is, a rough-and-ready sort of fellow. If the fish pirates learn that we have a greenhorn at the trap, they'll raid it the first night!"

Hathaway listened patiently, but it was Frayne rather than Gresham, who was an unobserving man for the job he held as superintendent, who saw color rising in the cheeks of young Hathaway, and a glint come in his eye: Frayne would have stopped Gresham, but it was too late.

The superintendent had taken another breath, and would have hurried on with his objections, but Hathaway cut in:

"That will be quite sufficient, Mr. Gresham. I'll send Jerry in, and you will please put him to work, as I have directed. Good day, gentlemen!"

With a stiff nod, he turned and went out of the door. A moment later Gresham and Frayne heard the pur of a motor speeded up. Young Hathaway was leaving. But just then the doorway was filled by Jerry McGee.

He was considerably taller and broader of shoulder than young Hathaway had been, and seemed rather a confident sort of person. Moreover, there was something about him which seemed vaguely familiar, although Gresham was quite certain that he had never seen McGee before.

"Well, boss," said the young man with a smile, "tell me when I go to work!"

For an instant Gresham glared at him. Then, with a throaty sound which registered disgust, the superintendent whirled and vanished into his office.

But as he closed the door, he flung over his shoulder: "You tell him, Frayne! I can't! *You* sit in and take a hand! That seems to be the new order of things around here!"

Young McGee, not abashed in the

slightest, grinned again as the irate superintendent banged the door. Somehow, Frayne found himself likewise grinning. He decided that, green though McGee was, he was distinctly likable.

CHAPTER II.

STEALTHY ATTACK.

IT was half an hour later, after Frayne had taken young McGee through the cannery and had explained the workings of it, that Frayne rowed the new watchman out to the trap. By that time, however, the story of the situation had spread among the employees. They stared curiously at the newcomer, and shook their heads, for it was a hundred-to-one bet that McGee would fail.

The old watchman, now dead, had been a hard man in his time, and had more than once distinguished himself in battles with fish pirates who had sought to "jump" him. This youngster would be "easy pickings" for the rough-and-ready crew which had been raiding the trap.

But the younger man, if he saw these commiserating looks, ignored them, and immediately became interested in the fish trap.

The trap was built of long piling, and mesh known as "chicken-pen" wire. Salmon, which move from the sea toward rivers, up which they go to spawn, travel along the shore of Puget Sound where the water is about forty feet deep. Their journey is like the flight of a bird, that is, they swim on a long slant upward until they nearly reach the surface, then they "sound" toward the bottom on the same slant.

In order to divert these finny hordes into the trap, a row of piling had been driven from a point near the shore straight out into the sound, to where the water was sixty feet deep. Then the wire mesh was strung from piling to piling.

The salmon, meeting this underwater

fence, would follow along it toward deeper water, trying to get around. Thus they would come to the entrance or "lead" of the trap. This entrance was long, and gradually narrowed until it emptied abruptly into a larger inclosure of wire, termed the "pot."

This in turn emptied into another wire pen, the "heart," and then into a final chamber, the "spiller." By the time the salmon had penetrated thus far, they had lost all sense of direction as to the various entrances, and were confused. They would mill around in the spiller until a crew of men came along with a big net, or brail, and scooped them out and onto a scow.

Sometimes, when the salmon run was heavy, a trap the size of the one at Opalo Cove would take eighty thousand fish in twenty-four hours. These fish, just as they came from the spiller, had a market value of one dollar each, for they were sockeyes, the choicest of salmon.

In the spiller the fish would be packed almost solid, a heaving, gleaming mass of silvery bodies constantly moving with a rolling, overturning motion, as they sought to escape—like thick sirup boiling over a slow fire.

All this was explained to the new watchman, who found much of interest in it. The trap was already more than half full, and Frayne announced that they would "lift" the fish the following morning, the cannery having purchased enough in the open market to keep it going since the last visit of the pirates.

"Old Pat McGee was a man," declared Frayne, "and if you're half the man he was, you'll make good. But I have my doubts, just as Gresham has. Still, you're here because the young boss said to put you to work.

"You'll stay here at night, when the fish are running heaviest, and it will be your job to see that the leads are kept open. At the same time, you'll keep

your eyes pealed for those pirates. As soon as they learn that it's *you* who is minding the trap, they'll be along.

"Of course, we can send down a couple more men to help you stand guard," he added, slight contempt in his voice, "but old Pat would never have it that way, even if they did get him in the end. In fact, we've had two men doing guard duty here since Pat's death. We can keep them on, if you like. But maybe your young boss would rather have you tackle the job alone?"

The young watchman shot a glance at Frayne.

"He would," he replied. "He'd want me to handle the job alone."

Frayne smiled. "Well, old Pat was a hard customer to handle," he remarked, "and you bear his name. Maybe blood will tell!"

"Wonder if it will?" was the young man's answer. "It's up to me to find out."

They went back ashore, then, and the new watchman made ready for his first night's vigil at the trap. With the coming of dusk he rowed out to the structure, and climbed up the ladder to the tiny house, built for a shelter when it was stormy.

He examined the place, and found, on a shelf, a fusee, or paper cylinder, which reminded him of a Roman-candle fireworks. He remembered that Frayne had told him of this, that it was to be touched off as a signal to shore that he needed help, in case the fish pirates appeared. At one end of the fusee was a sharp spike, by which the thing could be thrust upright into the planking and the fuse lighted. It would burn red, Frayne had said.

There was also a sawed-off shotgun hanging on the wall. The new watchman saw that it was loaded, and then went out to look over the trap. It was nearly full, he observed with satisfaction.

"Dad," he said aloud, as though somebody was at his elbow to hear him, "I'm going to need your help, all you can give me!" Then he began the slow, monotonous pacing along the planks that stretched around the top of the trap.

BUT nothing happened that night.

Sleepily, he rowed ashore when the crew came out to brail the trap shortly after daylight. He saw neither Gresham nor Frayne, but went straight to bed in the quarters which had been assigned to him in the bunk house.

For three nights after that, it was the same story. Gresham shook his head over it, puzzled.

"Well, nothing's happened so far," he said hopefully to Frayne. "We've made some good hauls with the trap, so far. But the season's not over yet. Do you suppose that the Samish Packing Co. has told the fish pirates to lay off, fearing that we've laid some kind of ambush for them?"

Frayne shrugged. "Hardly likely," he replied. "Chances are they're waiting for a dark night. No doubt they've already looked the situation over, and they undoubtedly know that we have a greenhorn for watchman. It would be safer if we'd send out a couple of men to stand guard with him, but he won't have it. In my opinion, you can look for the worst at any time!"

Gresham was to recall Frayne's words the following morning, when the foreman of the brailing crew came charging into the office.

"Trap has been robbed again!" the man announced. "That new watchman of ours must have quit cold, without a fight. He was lying in his shack on the trap, trussed up and gagged. They must have just climbed aboard, put a gun against his ribs, and made him like it!"

Gresham, swearing, hurried out of the office. The new watchman, a crest-fallen expression on his face, was approaching slowly.

Gresham scowled. "Why, you're not even marked up!" he jeered. "You didn't even fight! A fine mess you made of it. Didn't you have time to signal for help, even if you couldn't handle 'em alone?"

The young man shook his head ruefully. "Time for nothing," he replied. "First thing I knew they had me from behind—I couldn't even yell. There were at least six of them——"

Gresham snorted. "Of course!" he remarked sarcastically. "But at that, there were five too many of them. I'm thinking that one fish pirate alone could handle the job."

Gresham turned toward the office. "I'm going to telephone young Hathaway about it," he went on. "There was at least twenty-five thousand dollars' worth of fish in that trap. I'm thinking that when he learns of it, he'll let me put a real watchman on the job. You're as good as fired, McGee!"

Gresham got young Hathaway on the telephone at last, and gave him the facts. "I'm going to fire McGee," said the superintendent.

But the distant voice said calmly: "You'll do nothing of the kind! Keep him on the job as long as he wants to stay!"

And Gresham hung up the phone, and exclaimed to Frayne: "Can you beat that?"

Apparently Frayne couldn't. And so the matter rested.

CHAPTER III.

A MENACING HORDE.

THE new watchman, his ready smile not quite so apparent now, went about his work as usual. For a week the big trap took fish, the cannery kept going night and day, and Gresham, al-

though he avoided McGee, seemed to have subsided in smoldering anger. He resented the fact that his authority had been curtailed in regard to the young watchman, but there seemed nothing he could do about it, unless he resigned.

Frayne, however, counseled a waiting policy. "It won't be long now until something happens," he prophesied.

And in that he was correct. Something *did* happen. There came, for example, an exceedingly dark, moonless night——

Whatever the thoughts of the trap watchman, he said little, and he rowed out to the trap early that evening. The trap had been brailed the previous day, but the salmon were running strongly, and the spiller was nearly filled with glistening salmon. The trap would be lifted at dawn the following day, he knew.

Darkness found him moving about the trap, and the planks which he trod with his rubber-soled shoes gave no sound. Yet he paused now and then to listen, for the sea was quiet and sounds would carry far. From the night came the gurgling grunt of a seal, a querulous muttering of sea gulls roosting on the rocky point below the cannery, and the occasional weird cry of a loon. But all these sounds were natural, and did not disturb him. He went into the watchman's shanty after a time, and sat there, pondering the situation.

Ten o'clock came. It was time to make another round of the trap. Couldn't take too many chances, particularly after what had happened to him before. So he was cautious, yet not cautious enough. As he stepped from the watchman's shack, he heard a sound from near by, and whirled quickly.

Yet he had only a momentary vision of a dark form close by him, a figure with upraised right hand, and he flinched involuntarily. That movement

probably saved his life, for instead of landing on his head, the descending bludgeon struck him on the right shoulder.

The force of the blow was such that he tottered backward, trying to regain balance. Before he could do so, he stepped into space, and had the horrifying sensation of falling into blackness.

Down, down the watchman went, choking a scream. Then he struck something soft, yielding—and *alive!* He knew in an instant what had happened; *he had fallen into the spiller, with its milling thousands of fish!*

He struck on his back, almost in the center of the closely packed finny horde, and the softness of their round bodies broke his fall. Yet the shock of it made them suddenly go mad. Every one of them in the spiller began surging about, trying to escape from the threatened danger.

Instantly the whole mass was in motion. The watchman, fighting with hands and feet to stay on top, felt himself at the mercy of the countless fish who seemed determined to smother him. Even as he struggled, he could hear excited shouts of men above him on the trap. He saw them moving about, peering down into the spiller, but they could not see him.

He fought blindly now, eyes closed, for he feared the sharp fins of the struggling salmon. He felt as though he was an ant trying to climb out of a sand pit. He would be almost on top when the mass beneath him would give way. Hardly daring to breathe, he struggled on. He *must* reach the side of the spiller, where he could grip the wire mesh and hang on—or he would drown!

Now he heard men busy in a boat, which had been worked in between the piles. They were cutting the web of the spiller. Once this was accomplished, they would draw a purse seine

through the spiller and out of the opening they had created, and the salmon within the seine would be dumped into a waiting scow.

Fortunately for him, the fish pirates dared not show a light, for fear of attracting the attention of somebody on shore. From his position low down in the spiller, the young watchman could see the gaping hole in the wire, could see the men beyond it, and likewise those on the trap who were about to lower the purse seine.

Six of them he counted—the same gang which had held him up before. Evidently they did not know what had become of him now, and probably assumed that he had fallen into the sea and been drowned. Once he became entangled in the webbing with which they would brail out the trap, he would die!

BY dint of the utmost effort, he managed to swim through the seething salmon, in the direction of the hole cut in the webbing. There was such a furious splashing that the men outside evidently did not notice him. Suddenly he was in clear water, after having wallowed over the edge of the cut wire mesh.

He went under, but came up gasping and swimming. Within a dozen feet of him was the boat with two men in it. Despite the salt water in his ears, he heard one say:

"What's that splashing?" Then, answering his own question: "Must be a seal. Crack it on the head with an oar, Bill, if it gets near you!"

Still swimming, the young man saw, outlined against the sky, the form of a man with oar uplifted. Suddenly the oar swung downward—but the intended victim dived! He heard the oar strike the water above him, and he reached up and caught hold of it.

Throwing his weight into the effort, the young watchman jerked downward

on the oar. With a yell, the man who was wielding the weapon, went overboard suddenly.

But the watchman did not tarry. He was now swimming for the great skeletonlike framework of the fish trap. Behind him, he heard somebody say to the man who had fallen overboard:

"Not so much noise, you fool, or you'll bring that crowd at the cannery after us!"

At that instant, McGee's hands touched the piling of the trap.

He paused for a moment, then began working along to the ladder which he knew was somewhere near. At last he found it, and began pulling himself from the water. He was very tired from the exertion of fighting for his life in the spiller, but he knew there was no time to lose.

A yell from him might bring immediate help from the cannery, but he had another plan. Gaining the plank walk at the top of the trap at last, he found himself not ten feet from the watchman's shanty. The four men busy with the purse seine were some distance from him.

Inside the shack, he got the sawed-off gun. Then he found the fusee and matches. The first match fizzled out, for it had been wet by his fingers, but the second one burned steadily, and he applied it to the fusee. Then, stepping outside, he drove the sharp spike at the bottom of the fusee, in the planks. A second later, the whole trap was bathed in a reddish light as the Greek fire within the fusee was ignited.

Sheltered by the corner of the shack, the watchman cried out: "Hands up, everybody! I've got you covered!" He swung the muzzle of the gun back and forth at the astonished pirates on the trap.

But from the boat below he was answered by a pistol shot, the bullet ripping its way through the wooden walls of the shack. The shotgun roared in

reply, and a yell followed from the boat. At the same time the pirates on the trap began firing. Bullets chipped their way about McGee, but he was untouched. He fired again, but the pirates, after that first fusillade, had leaped into the water.

Likewise, the boat had vanished. Fearful of remaining in sight in that reddish flare from the fusee, which lighted the water for several hundred yards in every direction, the boat had drawn under the piling of the trap.

The pirates who had jumped into the sea evidently had crawled aboard the boat. Floating a short distance from the trap was the scow into which the pirates had planned to load the stolen fish.

YET, as McGee would have leaned over the edge of the planking, to cover the pirates hidden down there in the boat, a bullet spattered the corner of the shack, and he dodged back. One of the pirates had evidently climbed up a ladder from the water and, keeping under cover at the edge of the planking, was trying to kill the watchman.

Still the red flare from the fusee lay over the water. But now from shore came the moan of the siren on the cannery. The signal had been seen. Help was coming!

The pirates realized it, too, and knew they would have to move quickly. Three of them came up one ladder, firing as they climbed, while a noise behind McGee told him that others were scaling a second ladder.

Disregarding the bullets from those in front, he charged those behind him. As one jumped to the planking on top of the trap, McGee clubbed the shotgun. At that close range, he could have murdered the man, but would not do it. The gun swung, and the man dropped. The watchman leaped at the second man.

But that first blow had shattered the

gunstock, and the man evaded the stubby weapon. Evidently the pirate was unarmed, for he made no attempt to shoot, but sought to come to grips with the watchman. Just as he lunged forward, darkness fell swiftly. One of the pirates had kicked the flaming fusee into the water!

Yet at that instant, the clubbed gun found the second pirate's head, and he dropped without a sound. A third man loomed in front of the watchman, and he would have struck again, but there was the sound of running feet behind him. Something struck the watchman on the head, but he managed to swing the gun again like a flail about him—felt it land, heard a man groan. Then, as he fell, a strong white glare leaped across the water. The cannery searchlight!

Within three feet of him, McGee saw the contorted face of another man, a gun pointed.

McGee rolled over, as the gun roared, and leaped to his feet. His right fist smacked the murderous pirate full in the face. With a wild yell, the man toppled backward into the water.

McGee whirled on another man, but the latter was just vanishing down the ladder leading to the boat. Dizzy and faint from the blow he had received on the head, McGee took two steps in pursuit, stumbled and fell.

McGee came to with the realization that men were crowding around him. Then these were pushed aside, as Gresham appeared, and knelt down.

"Feeling better?" asked the superintendent solicitously. "That was a nasty crack you got on the head. But you cleaned 'em up, boy! I saw the finish of the fight, and I'd never believed it of you. I'm mighty sorry for what I said the other day!"

The young watchman smiled weakly, and gestured forgiveness.

"We've broken up this fish-pirate gang," the superintendent said. "You

can have the job of watchman as long as you want it!"

But the watchman smiled and shook his head. "I'm through," he announced. "You'll have to get another watchman!"

"Through?" echoed Gresham, puzzled. "Why? What will Hathaway say to that?"

"Nothing," replied the other, "*because I'm Hathaway!*" He was sitting up now, as strength flowed back to him.

Gresham and the others were speechless.

"I'm Jim Hathaway's boy," the watchman went on, "and I'm proud of it. When dad died and these business rivals tried to put him out of business, it was up to me to beat them.

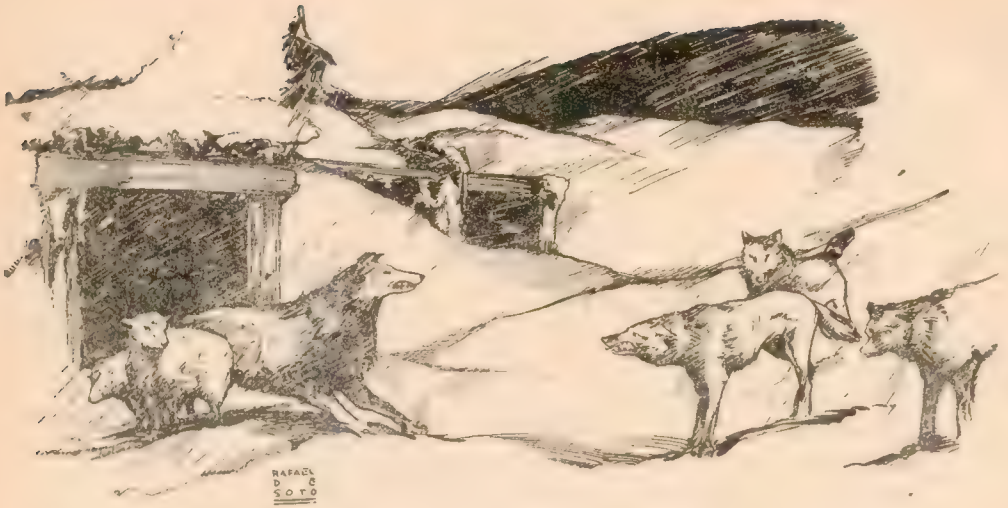
"I wanted to come out here and take a hand, but I wanted to get in the fight in my own way. If I'd told you who I was, and confessed that I didn't know a thing about this cannery business, I would have handicapped myself right at the start. Things would have gone along as before.

"I know that dad wouldn't have wanted me to trade on his reputation, so I resolved to get by on my own merits. The fact that Jerry McGee—who posed as myself the other day—had attended college with me, gave me the idea.

We merely traded identities. He wanted to come out here and square accounts with those fish pirates who had killed his father, but I persuaded him that it was more important to save the business than to have mere revenge. Anyway, I think the death of Jerry's father has been avenged."

Having finished, he got to his feet. Gresham saw now the resemblance to old Jim Hathaway, which had puzzled the superintendent the first time he had laid eyes on this young man. Suddenly Frayne, who stood behind the superintendent, chuckled.

"I said that blood will tell," he remarked. "Now I mean it!"



According to Orders

By William F. Bragg

COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

DEATH rode in the winter wind that lashed the grim ridge of the Devil's Hump. The sweep of a blizzard, two weeks before, had trapped Angus McSwaim's herd of sheep in vast fields of crusted snow. Brown blobs of frozen wool lay starkly on the black bed ground. Starving ewes stood humpbacked against sheltering rocks.

Under the sheep wagon, an old collie dog crouched and shivered in the piercing, evening cold.

Small wonder then that the range boss lost control of body and mind, when his dog turned into a frozen-faced bundle of overdriven muscles and raw nerves. The boss had looked too long on dumb-brute misery.

That morning, a four-horse team, hauling feed to the stricken camp, won a sixty mile battle with the drifts. The range boss eagerly ripped open the first

precious sack—and then raised both fists toward a bruised-looking, blue sky, and cursed the fool who had sent out white corn.

Wool-blind ewes, unseeing of the kernels spread out on the snow, would continue to starve and die, with food near but invisible. Another team would not get through in less than two weeks.

The range boss uttered a harsh order at sight of the snuffling dog.

"He's blind and sore-footed. Put him out of his misery, McSwaim."

Angus McSwaim examined the red-rimmed eyes, and soothed a swollen paw with a bit of mutton tallow.

"The snow crust cut his pads," he explained. "The sun glare hurt his eyes. 'Tis far worse than a summer sun. You were not here when the blizzard struck.

"But I'm tellin' you, sir. While there was the ghost of a show of cross-in' the Hump, this old fellow worked

twice as hard as the younger dogs. But when the sheep started dyin' like flies, age seemed to come over him suddenlike. He crawled under the wagon—and hasn't stirred since. He'll not last long. A bullet seems hardly right, for——"

The range boss answered curtly: "None will deny he was once a good dog. He's a handicap now. McSwaim, you have no time nor strength to waste on anything but your sheep. And besides, a bullet would be a mercy. See to it, McSwaim."

ANGUS McSWAIM was a man who followed orders, reasonable or unreasonable, to the letter. Life in Wyoming and service with a Highland regiment in France had drilled obedience into the very marrow of his bones. The range boss was reasonable. A bullet would be a mercy.

But as McSwaim led the limping collie away from camp, he looked the length of his long Scotch nose and plotted mutiny. He was not the man to kill an honest sheep dog. Let him die in peace. Angus McSwaim would always find the time to feed and care for him until the need was past.

For three years, herder and dog had worked together. The collie was old when he began following Angus. But his careful, saving use of brain and strength, his devotion to the sheep, had touched the heart of the dour Scot, who admired thrift and efficiency above all things.

"I know not your name," he had said at the end of the first week's work. "But from the sarvice stripe about your neck, an' the deep, thump-in' ring o' your bark, I doot not yer an auld sojer. And that's what McSwaim'll call ye."

Now, Old Soldier was reporting off duty. A brief court-martial had ordered him shot to death by musketry. A rebellious firing squad of one, act-

ing as court of review, intended changing the sentence to retirement on half pay and medical attention.

The old coal mine offered the best near-by hiding place. No man ventured near the scooped-out chamber in the shale bank. "Slim" Johnson, a camp mover, had come here earlier in the winter for a load of fuel—and remained, until found, with a bullet hole through his head. Slim was another man who had wearied of watching the dumb brutes suffer.

In the mine's chilly shelter, McSwaim bedded down Old Soldier.

"The dark will rest your eyes," he said. "And Doctor McSwaim will call each day with grease for the feet and boiled mutton for the stomach. Rest easy, Auld Sojer, yer on the sick list."

The dog looked up with a dim glow in his golden-brown eyes. His tail weakly thumped the floor. Angus McSwaim, for want of a better move, winked his misty blue eyes, loudly blew his nose, and crawled hurriedly out of the mine.

Then he paused. "There's the broth of a breeze stirrin' the snow," he muttered. "We'll have cauld afore mornin'. An' the laddie's coat is wore thin in spots."

He removed his outer, wool-lined coat. Next to his shirt, he wore a faded-khaki blouse. Once it had flared above Highlander kilts on dress parade. It was McSwaim's proudest possession; his last remembrance of another land where death had toyed with men instead of sheep and dogs.

"But 'tis a fit tunic for an auld sojer to die in," he murmured, and reentered the mine. "'Twill keep him warm this night. At dawn, I'll fetch him a blanket."

Lifting the collie's body, he shoved forelegs down through the blouse sleeves and tightly fastened the brass-buttoned front across the thin chest. Then, with a farewell pat, McSwaim

stepped out under the snapping light of the winter stars.

Nearing the camp, he frowned at the sight of an uneasy herd on the bed ground. Bells tinkled here and there. Half the ewes had not yet lain down. The breeze was rising to a dry, bitter wind that riffled the drifts and picked up powdery, frozen snow.

The range boss said nothing about the dog. He, also, was listening and thinking only of that outside howl around the canvas-topped wagon. The two range men sat crouched and sleepless over the red-hot stove. They were ready for work when the wind finally knocked the herd off the bed ground at midnight.

Toward the Devil's Hump, they followed the blindly drifting sheep. Man or dog could do no more. They could only bow backs to the storm and stay with the herd. The gale howled like a wolf pack on the trail. The temperature dropped far below the zero mark.

THE chill of the cold crept into the old sheep dog's shelter. He stirred sluggishly and rolled into a tighter ball of brown-and-white fur. The khaki blouse offered some small comfort. But he missed the familiar sheepskin-pelt bed under the wagon, the snug-gled-up warmth of the younger dogs.

The drift of the herd past the mine awakened him from his uneasy sleep. Old Soldier pricked up his ears. The herd had left the bed ground. For years, it had been his duty to halt the unseemly antics of foolish muttons. Rising, he stretched his aged joints, and crawled stiffly out into the storm.

No chance to stop the herd. A line of men with shotguns could not have stayed the march. Back in the snow dust of the rear, two young collies were already icy muzzled and half dead from frenzied effort. Angus McSwaim and the range boss were in like shape.

The jangling monotony of bells

came faintly to Old Soldier's ears. He crouched in the snow, while files of the herd plodded slowly past like an army in retreat. He watched as does a stricken leader who takes a last salute from his men.

Every army has its rear guard of warriors and stragglers. So it was with the herd. The stragglers came now, a half dozen ewes, too weak to keep up but still driven ahead by the lash of the wind.

Behind galloped the guerrilla warriors of the bad lands. The taint of their coming reached Old Soldier's nostrils. A thrill of fierce anger, coursing through his body, put new life in ancient bones.

Coyotes were on the trail. Tired ewes offered an easy meal for the hungry pack.

Old Soldier moved straight into the wind. His long muzzle went up as he mustered strength for a rolling, deep-throated bark. The ewes heard and thankfully obeyed the voice of a well-known guardian. Swinging to the side, they trailed into the mine.

Old Soldier, backing into the entrance, awaited the coming of the enemy.

With a rush that threw snow high into the air, the pack raced up. The trail ended here. The leader's straw-green eyes centered on the dark entrance. His fangs were bared. He yearned for the kill, the taste of hot meat. With jaws gaping, he sprang forward.

Poised on stiff front legs, Old Soldier received the vicious fangs full in his white-ruffed neck. He barked once in deep defiance of the foe. Then all his strength went into a slashing return. His jaws snapped and clicked like a steel trap.

Yelping in sudden pain, the coyote danced back. He had sought mutton. Instead, he had encountered a sheep-dog's teeth.

With the caution of his kind, he shifted about in a wary circle. His craven followers squatted in the snow with bushy tails curled over their toes, and waited for him to attack or flee.

For his part, Old Soldier felt a curious, soothing weakness spread over his body. He was utterly weary. Inch by inch, he sank down until he lay on the ground with head resting on outflung forepaws. But dim eyes still watched steadily the coyote pack.

The pack leader was torn between fear and curiosity. A sleeve of the faded-khaki coat, ripped loose by his fangs, gently rose and fell as it flapped in the wind. With outstretched nose, the leader crept forward. A vagrant eddy of scent touched his twitching nostrils.

Fear overcame him. A low yip of dismay, and he bolted madly into the curtain of the storm. After him scudded his panicky mates. The khaki coat with the flapping sleeve was heavy with man smell.

Old Soldier lay quietly in front of the ewes. Other coyotes came that night. The sight of the dog, the gently stirring sleeve, and the fearsome scent of man drove them away toward easier prey.

AT daybreak, two men staggered down from the bared crest of the Devil's Hump. One paused and shielded burning eyes with a mittened hand.

"Looks like a man layin' in front of the mine," he said. He laughed unsteadily. "Maybe it's Slim Johnson

come out to bid farewell to the sheep. He's wavin' an arm."

The range boss could grin through pain this morning—and spin his ghastly jests. The storm had driven his sheep over the Hump and down into open country where feed wagons could travel.

But his face became grim when he reached the mine. He stared at McSwaim. The range boss never overlooked disregard of a command.

"I ordered him killed," he said slowly. "I find him here asleep—wrapped up in your old army coat."

McSwaim was bending over the brown form. Old Soldier lay as though asleep with muzzle resting quietly on his white, sore paws.

But Angus McSwaim saw that which the boss had not yet perceived—the marks where fangs had pierced the throat of Old Soldier, the khaki blouse, stiff with frozen blood; the confused tracks of coyotes in the snow, and frightened sheep back in the mine; and a sleeve that flapped aimlessly in the wind.

"Your orders have been carried out," the Scot reported gravely. "Auld Sojer is not asleep."

Where the bad-land wind eternally whips the Devil's Hump, McSwaim rocked up a lonely mound of earth. At the head, he placed a board. On it, with Scotch economy of words and strict attention to the military truth, he scrawled the following inscription:

OLD SOLDIER

DIED ON DUTY.

HOW MANY KNIVES?

A Mystery Story of Show People by Earl W. and Marion Scott.

Complete in Our Next Issue.



Slugger McCoy

By Burt L. Standish

A SERIAL—PART II

CLAD in dilapidated clothes, his features hidden by a beard, a tramp crashed into the Florida ball park where the Bluebirds, a big-league team, were practicing. Manager Harrigan agreed to let the tramp—who replied when addressed as “Slugger” McCoy—do his stuff on the pitching mound.

Colt Faraday, fielder and bludgeoning batsman, was selected to try out the newcomer. The stranger baffled Faraday with speed and curves, arousing Faraday’s animosity.

In Harrigan’s opinion, McCoy was not seasoned sufficiently to play in the big league. Besides, McCoy’s attire and secrecy concerning his past were against him.

Roger Carey, a rookie pitcher, recognized McCoy, but promised not to reveal his identity. Nancy Carey, Roger’s sister, also recognized the newcomer, but ignored him, treating him as if he were a stranger.

Later, clad in new, well-selected clothes, McCoy presented himself to the

manager. Harrigan insisted upon an explanation from McCoy.

McCoy admitted that he had served a jail sentence, for driving an automobile recklessly. He declined to tell his real name, saying that he wanted to play on the Bluebird team, and that his name had nothing to do with his ability as a ball player. Angered, Harrigan told McCoy to get out. McCoy departed, after saying that he was still determined to become a member of the Bluebird team.

CHAPTER IX.

CROOKED WORK.



IN a few days the “Yannigans” and the Regulars—the latter outfit so called because it was practically made up of old players—began playing short practice games. Later, the Bluebirds would take on some of the Southern clubs before departing for the North

in company with the "Buddies," with which team they would play a series of exhibition games en route. The Tampa Giants, a colored aggregation that was said to be fast, was accepted by Harrigan for the Bluebirds' opening encounter with the Southern teams.

Slugger McCoy was conspicuous by his absence.

"It looks like we've seen the last of that piece of fresh tripe," commented Colt Faraday. "I guess he's throwed up the sponge and gone looking for other worlds to conquer."

"It's queer," said Roger Carey. "I didn't think he'd quit without saying another word to me. He isn't the kind to throw up the sponge short of a knock-out."

"But I hear the old man handed him that," Faraday chuckled. "When Bill Harrigan says 'No,' he changes his mind about as often as Halley's comet comes around."

Colt was doing his best to get on friendly terms with Roger Carey. So were nearly all the unmarried men of the squad. He was having it pretty soft, for which he could thank his sister.

For the more those fellows saw of Nancy the more bewitched they became. In sport clothes she was "a peach," in riding togs—she rode daily—she was "a smasher." In an evening gown, she wowed 'em!

Harrigan looked over his men one night as they appeared for the evening meal. "Where'd I collect this bunch of collar advertisements?" he yelled. "If this keeps up, this club's going to lose the name Bluebirds and get itself known as the Sheiks!"

The players, with scarcely an exception, were shaved and primped and spruced as if they were going to attend an informal dance. They looked like "What the Well-dressed Man Will Wear!" Nancy Carey was the cause.

Colt Faraday made a striking figure.

True, he was huge and far from handsome, but he was not one to be overlooked.

Nancy Carey had an air about her that discouraged the timid ones. She was not a snob, just a real individual. She could be friendly enough under proper conditions, but her natural poise, telling as it did of fine breeding, filled her ball-player admirers with dread of making a *faux pas* in her presence.

Faraday was the exception. He put himself forward with swaggering assurance. A blunder in the amenities meant nothing to him. He usually remained unaware of it. When something did make him aware that he'd made a break, he ignored it or turned it into a joke.

He interested, amused, and annoyed Nancy—at first. Presently he interested and amused her. He appeared to be getting on very well. The others, unable to understand why, were almost bursting with jealous envy.

"Say, Colt!" said Dodo Dunn one day, as a few of the players were loafing in the big chairs on the hotel veranda. "Let us in on your method. How do you do it?"

"Do what?" grunted Faraday, chewing at the end of a cigar.

"Why, make 'em fall! Hook 'em. Get 'em on the string. We're all blinko over that Nancy girl, but you're the only one she'll let play in her yard. She's just pleasant and polite to us, but when you come to bat, her face lights up like Broadway at Forty-second Street. How'd you sell yourself to her?"

The big outfielder grinned and winked. "If I was to tell you, Dodo, you'd know," Faraday answered. "I always batted well with the dames."

"Not in the league she belongs to," retorted the shortstop. "This gal is class."

"Oh, the classier they are, the harder they tumble," boasted Faraday. "A

guy's got to have the goods and know his onions. That's all."

Dodo grimaced. "Aw, you make me sick! Now lemme tell ya something. Just for the time being, she's letting you furnish her with entertainment and diversion, as long as you're on the same ball team as her brother is. But your day is short. Bimeby she's going to get enough, and she'll hand you the go-roll-your-hoop. Wait till a real guy of her own class comes along. Then you'll have a job to pick the loose parts of yourself out of an ash can."

"Oh, is that so?" Colt pulled down the corners of his big mouth. "Well, wise boy, you wait and see. And don't talk to me no more about that little lady. I'm a gent, I am, and I don't discuss ladies in public. More'n that, I give notice now that I won't listen to no more of it about her from any of you birds. Get me!" With that he got up and walked away.

While Faraday had never been highly popular with his teammates, he was of the thick-skinned type that ignores or fails to take rebuffs. When he felt like doing so, he butted in where he was most unwelcome, and he stayed around. The only way to keep him out of a poker game that he wanted to get into was to leave him in ignorance that such a game was going on.

Nancy Carey came to him one evening, looking a little disturbed. "Mr. Faraday," she said, "I wish you'd do something for me."

"Name it," said Colt gallantly, "and it'll be done."

"My brother's playing cards in room 318 with some people I don't like. Maybe you've noticed them, a square ox of a man, and a sleek, pale-faced, black-haired fellow. They're registered here as John P. Dornicker and Alfred Moore, from Kansas City. They claim to be real-estate operators."

"Sure, I've lamped them two birds.

They're a coupla come-on trimmers. How'd Roge get in with them?"

"Oh, they scraped up an acquaintance with my brother somehow. Roger's easy. Really he needs a guardian. That's one reason why I'm here. I don't object to his playing cards now and then, but I don't like to have him do it with strangers. Can't you get into that game and keep watch of things—see that it's all right?"

"You've asked me to, and I'll like to see somebody stop me!" said the outfielder.

He knocked at the door of room 318 three minutes later. The door was opened by Dornicker. Faraday walked in.

Dornicker objected. "Who invited you?" he said, trying to block the way.

"That's all right, friend," said Colt, laughing. "I can smell a poker game right through solid walls. When I get the smell in my nose, I can't keep away. There's a friend of mine setting in with you gents. He'll tell you I'm all right. You need a fifth man, anyhow. I'll give you a shot at my bank roll."

"Oh, let him in, Mr. Dornicker," urged Roger Carey, smiling. "I'll vouch for him."

Besides Dornicker, Moore, and Carey, a man named Rand, who claimed to be from Boston, was playing. Each man had an iced drink at his elbow and chips stacked before him. On another table were two bottles of liquor, a pitcher of water, and a huge dish of cracked ice.

"Looks like the opening of a large evening," observed Faraday, taking his coat off and getting a chair. "Excuse me if I don't deprive you of any of your hooch. I'm particular about my eyesight—specially when I play poker."

"Suit yourself," said Dornicker, apparently not pleased by the intrusion. "One bottle's rye and one's Scotch. It's first-class stuff, but nobody's going

to hold you and pour it down your throat."

Dornicker was a blunt person with heavy jowls and huge, hard hands. His clothes made a loud noise.

Moore was slim, quiet, cold-eyed, and he wore dark clothes. His dark hair, parted in the middle, was brushed down flat and smooth. A diamond like a locomotive headlight blazed on his left hand, which was white, soft, and long-fingered. He didn't appear to be over twenty-five years old.

Faraday sized the pair up, and felt confirmed in his suspicion that they were crooked. Rand, the Boston man, looked like a boob. Probably the sharks had picked him and Carey for a skinning.

The game ran along quietly enough for thirty minutes or more. Faraday took a stack of chips. He won two or three small pots which had kept him about even. Dornicker growled at the cards, saying there weren't any pairs in the pack.

Then, on Moore's deal, everybody around the board seemed to get something good. There was some lively betting before the draw. Drawing, Dornicker took two cards, Carey one, Rand one, and Moore stood pat.

As the betting was about to be resumed, Faraday spoke suddenly: "Your fours are no good, Roger," he declared. "You'd better drop that full house, Mr. Rand. It beats this straight, but it ain't any good." He spread a straight out before them, faces upward.

"Huh?" exclaimed the Boston man, astonished. "How'd you know I've got a full house?"

"Why, I figured Mr. Moore filled your two pairs for you when you took one pasteboard. I don't know what he's holding, not having got a good look at the backs of his cards. But Dornicker's got four kings, which beats anybody but Moore, anyhow."

"What do you mean?" cried Roger Carey.

"I mean that these cards are 'readers'!" roared Faraday, pushing back from the table suddenly, "and that Moore's a damned card sharp who can deal 'em any way he wants to!"

CHAPTER X.

HUNTING FOR IVORY.

DORNICKER'S right hand shot out and clutched the neck of one of the bottles at his elbow. He swung the bottle like a club at Faraday's head.

The big outfielder side-stepped with astonishing quickness, and smashed Dornicker with his fist, knocking the square block of a man crashing across the other table.

Roger Carey was rising when Moore leaped up, whirling his chair into the air to smash Faraday down. Carey made a grab at the chair, and diverted the blow. Rand, appalled, scrambled up and ran out of the room.

Faraday got at Moore before the chair could be swung again. He gave the sleek rascal a smash that sent him headlong against the wall. Moore slumped down to the floor, unconscious.

Instantly the outfielder turned his attention to Dornicker again, and fastened hooked fingers on the neck of the man as he was rising.

Dornicker had the strength of an abysmal brute. He broke Colt's grip and closed with him. Down they went, the floor jarring beneath the impact of their great bodies.

Carey, seeking to help Faraday, was baffled by the amazing gyrations of those locked bodies, which whirled and flopped over the floor, mowing a zig-zag swath through the crashing furniture.

Suddenly Carey saw that Moore, a little recovered from the paralyzing blow that had felled him, was sitting up with his back against the wall and

fumbling in his pocket. The pitcher reached the fellow just in time to kick a pistol out of his hand. The weapon spun to the ceiling like a glittering pin-wheel. Carey caught it as it fell.

At that moment Faraday, holding the square man by both ears, was beating a tattoo on the floor with the back of Dornicker's head. That was the stuff to put Dornicker to "sleep." Stretched flat upon his back, he wilted like an uprooted weed flung upon a sun-scorched rock, and was "out."

Faraday rose. "Where'd you get that gat?" he asked, seeing the pistol in Carey's hand.

"He had it," answered Roger Carey, motioning toward Moore.

"A strong-arm yegg and a gunman, this pair of bozos!" said Faraday, showing his big teeth in a triumphant grin. "You sure picked some nice little playmates, Roge!"

The racket of the fight, together with the alarm which Rand had raised, brought a rush of the hotel force to that room, followed by alarmed, wide-eyed male guests.

"What's this mean?" cried the hotel manager, pushing in, his face pale and indignant.

"Why, it means you've been putting up a coupla gypping thugs, Mr. Melcher," answered Faraday. "They invite two of your guests in here to play a gent's game, and then they spring a deck of marked cards. Here's the evidence." He gathered up the scattered cards and thrust them upon the manager.

"Great guns!" exclaimed Melcher. "I don't want a scandal in my hotel! It'll hurt my business if this gets into the papers. They look as though they'd been used pretty rough. What're we going to do about it?"

"We're not looking for any newspaper notoriety either," said Roger at once. "I'm willing to let them off if they settle for the chips we bought."

Rand had returned, and he likewise expressed a willingness to let the affair drop if he got his money back. Faraday agreed. So the door was closed to keep others out, and the settlement was made as soon as Dornicker recovered sufficiently to hand over the money. Later, Dornicker and Moore, carrying their hand baggage, left by the side door of the hotel.

Though this affair was kept out of the newspapers, there was much wagging of tongues in the Magnolia. Manager Harrigan, hearing the tittle-tattle, was annoyed. He called Carey and Faraday up on the carpet.

"Now let's have this thing straight," growled the irritated manager. "How'd you two nitwits happen to let yourselves be hooked by them boob hunters?"

Carey took the blame. "Why, Dornicker and Moore seemed to be all right, Mr. Harrigan," he said, "and I fell for it when they invited me to sit into a quiet little gentleman's game. I'd have been skinned if Colt Faraday hadn't butted in and exposed the crooks." He recounted details of the affair.

"Well, let this learn you to lay off strange ginks, no matter how all right they 'pear to be," said Harrigan scornfully. "I'm wise now why your sister's sticking so close to you. You do require a guardian. If you've got to gamble, there's usually a hot penny-ante game going on among your own crowd. They'll take you in and trim you up for your loose change. I don't mind a little poker playing for chicken feed, but playing for real money gets the discouraging frown from me. Don't forget my advice, Carey, for you ain't set so hard that I can't afford to invite you to walk the plank any day."

He turned to Faraday. "And next time you hear anything like this is going on, Colt, you come to me and let me 'tend to it, get me? If that little pasty-faced, snake-eyed shark had shot

you full of lead I'd lost a dam'-fool ball player, which would have been money out of my pocket. Remember, I can trade you off for one with more brains any time you make me so sick I can't stand it any longer."

"Thanks, Bill," the big outfielder grinned. "I'm glad to know you think I'm worth something to you, if only for swapping purposes."

In spite of this call-down, Faraday was well satisfied with himself and what he had done. He felt sure he'd made himself still more solid with Nancy Carey. He was now a hero in her eyes.

ON the day set for the Tampa Giants to play the Bluebirds, Harrigan found a meaty, leathery-faced middle-aged man waiting for him at the hotel. The manager of the Birds squinted at the new arrival, his face expressing surprise. The man was "Sailor Joe" Maroney, a former Bluebirds' pitcher, now doing scout work for Taggart's Bears, another big-league team.

"Ahoy, you barnacle-crust'd old windjammer!" greeted Maroney, stepping forward, his shrewd eyes twinkling. "Gimme your hook!"

"What in blazes are you doing here, Joe?" inquired Harrigan, as they shook hands.

"Oh, just beating around a little. Sort of trying to speak a youngster that's gone off the chart. That brought me down this way, and I decided to lay up at Margalo and give you a welcome back to navigation. If age and a rusty wing hadn't sent me to snug harbor, I'd sure like to be with the Bluebirds, with you at the wheel again."

"Thanks for them kind words," said Harrigan suspiciously. "Hope you ain't got your lamps on any of my players."

"Why, if I had, you know I'd never mess with him till after you'd handed

him his papers, Bill. I don't practice no scuttling tricks."

"That's right! And I'm glad to see you. Tie up and watch us play our first game to-morrow with the Tampa Giants, if the delay ain't going to eat into your valuable time."

"Well, maybe I'll do that little thing."

Sailor Joe was sitting on the bench of the Bluebirds when the black Tampa Giants galloped onto the field the next day. The colored players were a lively looking lot, bubbling over with good nature and festive spirits. They wore suits of gray, with purple stockings and purple caps. Their manager, snappy, young, with keen, intelligent eyes and a businesslike air, sought Harrigan.

"We met with a misfortune, Mr. Harrigan, and lost 'Rocky' Ford, our regular pitcher," he explained. "So we had to take another heaver. Maybe he don't match up with the rest of my Blackbirds, but I don't s'pose you'll object to that, sir, as long's he can deliver 'em—which he sure can do some! There he is, jest peeling off his sweater and getting ready to galvanize his wing into action. Take it from me, you're going to see some action, too."

"He looks as if he was a white man!" said Harrigan.

"White is accurate, sir," allowed the manager of the visiting team.

Harrigan laughed. "Well, that's a new one—a white man pitching for the all-colored Tampa Giants. But it makes no bit of difference to me, as long as he's good enough to heave a game that'll be interesting and give us some practice."

"Believe you me, Mr. Harrigan," was the confident retort, "he'll make it interesting, though maybe the batting practice you're looking for won't meet your expectations. He carries a steam shovel full of riddles up his sleeve."

"We'll solve his riddles," said Harrigan.

Maroney uttered a sharp exclamation of astonishment. "Why, blame my binnacle lights!" he cried, staring at the white pitcher for the Giants. "That's the youngster I've been cruising after! Now I'll have a chance to see him work."

"Huh?" grunted Harrigan, turning to gaze again at the young man in question. "Well, he's got the build——" Then he caught his breath with a gulping, choking sound. "I'll be damned!" he said. "I'll be damned if it ain't Sluggar McCoy!"

CHAPTER XI.

LOTS OF STUFF.

WHEN the umpire called "play," George Clash, a frisky yellow boy, cantered into the batter's box and faced "Lon" Spence. Harrigan had chosen Spence to pitch the opening innings for the Bluebirds.

"Heave de missle over, Mistah Pitcher," invited Clash agreeably, "and watch me split a board in de fence with it. I'se got my board all selectioned."

Spence steamed the ball across. The batter crashed a liner into left center. Then the olive lad showed his speed. He flashed over first and reached second ahead of the throw-in.

"My error, Mistah Pitcher," he apologized regretfully. "I had de range required by longitude, but I miscalcufied de latitude. I'se gwine improve as de game digresses."

"Hosiery" Jordan, as black as midnight on the Styx, followed Clash. After mournfully watching Spence pitch two balls outside, he unexpectedly bunted the next one. That caught the whole Bluebird infield flat-footed. Before the sphere could be fielded, Clash was perched on third and Jordan was too close to first for an attempt to be made to throw him out.

Sitting on the Bluebirds' bench, Sailor Joe Maroney chuckled. "Spence

had better begin using his stuff, Bill," said the scout to Harrigan. "I know about these Tampa boys. They're better'n the old Cuban Giants ever was."

Harrigan made no reply.

The third batter for the visitors was Columbus Mosby, a bullet-headed, bow-legged menace. He took a stance in the box that bent him out over the plate.

Spence immediately whipped a "duster" at him.

Mosby was hit on the head, the ball bounding off with a sound as if it had struck a block of wood. Grinning pleasantly, Mosby jogged down to first, filling the corners.

Now Mr. "Biff" Oliphant, over six feet tall, broad-shouldered, oak limbed, a human Thor in ebony, stepped out from the bench. He had been swinging two bats around his head.

Discarding one of them and handling the other as if it weighed no more than a toothpick, he strode toward the plate. As he advanced he sang in the softened diapason of distant thunder: "Swing low, sweet chariot! You'se gwine fo' to carry me home!"

"Sure gwine fo' to carry us home!" echoed Clash, in tenor, from third.

At first base, Mosby interpolated in second bass: "Swing low! Swing low!"

"This," chuckled Maroney, the scout, "is going to be as good as a minstrel show."

"They're having all their fun now," said Bill Harrigan. "My lads'll wake up when they see it's necessary."

"Well, look out they don't oversleep," warned Maroney. "It can happen."

Spence decided that the situation demanded his best efforts. He showed steam and put a keen break on the ball. The next batter caught the first ball pitched. He whammed it on a line over the head of "Bammer" Burke, the Birds' center fielder.

The Giants gathered four runs without a man being put out. The colored team held a jubilee at once.

Harrigan rose to his feet and gave Lon Spence the high sign. "Go in there and do some pitching!" he said to "Plug" Bayne. "This farce has gone far enough!"

Bayne went on to the hill and used all his stuff. The next three men were put out—one, two, three.

"Now get into it!" said the Bluebirds' manager, as his players returned to the bench. "Trouble with you loafers is you thought you had a snap. These boys can play the game. There's a bunch of sport writers reporting this game for the Northern papers. We're going to get an elegant razzing if we don't win."

The Giants pranced onto the field. It was interesting to see the one white-skinned man among them take his place on the mound. The crowd stared at McCoy curiously.

"Everready" Forseyth, the colored catcher, having strapped on shin guards and shoved his paw into his big catching mitt, went behind the plate, grinning.

"Let your wing raise a breeze, Mistah McCoy," said Everready. "The day of great rejoicing am here."

McCoy got the range of the plate before "Nibs" Meadows, leading off for the Birds, stepped into the batter's box. After missing two hooks, Meadows rapped out a short single.

"That big bluff on the slab's going to be fruit for us to-day," said Colt Faraday. "This will be his last appearance in these parts."

Dodo Dunn, the next man up, rolled a bunt toward third. McCoy was on the ball like a tiger. He foiled Dunn's strategy by winging the sphere to second for a force-out. A double play would have followed if Baxter, the colored shortstop, hadn't made a poor heave to first.

Bammer Burke faced McCoy. He, like Faraday, had made a reputation as a fence-buster. Speed was his delight. As though he were aware of that fact, Slugger gave him slow, wide-breaking hooks.

Burke reached desperately for two of them. On the third attempt he caught the sphere on the end of his bat. A wabbling grounder twisted out of the hands of Oliphant, back of first. Oliphant recovered the ball too late to prevent Dunn from reaching second. He touched first base before Burke arrived, however.

Then Faraday went into the batter's box. "I ain't seen you whiff anybody so fur," he sneered. "Your pals are going to need another man out there before this game's half through."

McCoy's answer was a smile—a smile of cold dislike. He began pitching to the big slugger of the Bluebirds, using his head as well as speed, a change of pace, and effectively baffling curves. Faraday struck out.

"Now you've seen me whiff one," said McCoy.

CHAPTER XII.

HIT THE BALL.

COLT was swearing to himself, under his breath, when he again went out to his position in the field. His hatred of McCoy was measureless. Never before had any man aroused such intense antagonism in him. He knew Nancy Carey was among the spectators, and his failure to hit the ball had humiliated him.

There was satisfaction, however, in knowing she also hated McCoy. Some day, Faraday told himself, he would find out the reason for her dislike. Thus far he had wisely refrained from saying much about the fellow to her, though it hadn't been easy to hold his curiosity in check.

McCoy had a past that he was hid-

ing from them. Faraday meant to find out why.

"Let the good work go on," cackled Forseyth, swinging a big bat.

Plug Bayne did his best to make Everready fan, but the colored catcher finally whammed the pill for a pretty single.

Sailor Joe Maroney nudged Manager Harrigan. "Your pitchers don't seem to have their sea legs under them yet, Bill," he said. "The pilot before you sure did wreck the twirling staff horrible."

"He sold his pitchers every time he could get money for them," admitted Harrigan sourly. "Now maybe I'll have to throw Houck into the breach to stop the slaughter."

Hank Houck, a youngster from the Western Association, was the solitary Bluebird pitcher of the past season whose work had brought much praise from the sports writers.

"Well, now we'll see what that lad McCoy can do with the old belaying pin," said Maroney. "I've heard he socks the pellet."

McCoy was at the plate. He stood up straight and easy, the willow on his shoulder, his toes almost touching the chalk line, his heels close together. His batting form was practically perfect. But he was a pitcher, and maybe Bayne reckoned that, like a great many pitchers, McCoy was a feeble hitter.

At any rate, Plug tried to get an advantage by burning one across to start with. The calm, clear-eyed young man with the club seemed to put all the driving force of his fine shoulders and muscular, supple back into his swing, yet he did so with no great exhibition of effort.

Hit on the seam, the ball shot away like a missile from a catapult.

"Holy mackerel!" exclaimed Sailor Joe Maroney. "That's a wham!"

Harrigan's wide eyes marked the flight of the ball. The sphere went

over center-field fence, ten feet above the top. Old Bill turned to Houck.

"Come on, Hank!" he said. "It's your turn to let 'em cuff your stuff. If you can't stop their capers, I'm going to need the attention of a heart specialist."

Bayne came in from the hill, looking crestfallen. "I grooved that fast one," he said, "instead of putting it inside, where I tried to."

"I've heard all the alibis there are," said Harrigan. "What you did was a Steve Brodie, and that bird wasn't the butterfly you thought he was."

McCoy got a hand from the crowd as he jogged to the plate on the last lap of his home run. He acknowledged the applause by touching his cap and smiling. He knew where Nancy Carey was sitting among the spectators, but he didn't turn his eyes in that direction.

Warned by the fate of those who had gone before, Houck turned loose with all he had. He retired Clash and Jordan by the strike-out route, and made Mosby pop to Dodo Dunn. The colored team already had a lead of 6 to 0.

Bill Harrigan was not happy. Nor was he cheered when Slugger McCoy retired the next three Bluebird batters who faced him, two of them striking out.

"Maybe that lad's just as good as they told me he was," said Maroney. "He's got the earmarks of a pitcher."

"Before this game's over," declared Harrigan, "we're going to get at him and make him look like what he is, which is a raw turnip. I've seen 'em start the same way before, but they can't stand the gaff when the breaks begin to go against 'em. They blow."

A pitching battle between Houck and McCoy ran through the third and fourth innings, to the apparent annoyance of the Bluebird hurler, who didn't relish having his best work equaled by a busher. Hank also held the high-

spirited Giants in the hollow of his hand in the first half of the fifth, but luck turned against McCoy when the big-leaguers came to bat again.

Behind McCoy his team made three glaring errors in succession, putting Bluebird runners on every corner. Then the next batter hit to left field. The outfielder misjudged the fly. Worse still, he followed with a wild throw. Four runs were chalked up for Harrigan's team.

"I knew it had to happen," said Bill, with a slow, satisfied grin. "This McCoy bozo is now through."

"Even with three men on, you'd only made one run if that left fielder had grabbed the old apple," reminded Maroney. "Maybe the lad on third could have scored after the catch—but no more. Up to now, your whammers have made just one legitimate hit off McCoy, and that was in the first inning. I ain't saying he won't blow now, but let's wait and see."

Instead of blowing, Slugger behaved as if he had decided it was up to him alone to stop the Birds. He fanned the next three batters in a row.

The crowd gave McCoy a spontaneous and hearty cheer. His feat had won admiration. Henceforth to the end of the game he had the sympathy and encouragement of a large part of the spectators.

"That didn't look much like blowing up, Bill," said Maroney to Harrigan. Harrigan was silent.

The Tampa Giants fell on Hank Houck and made him sweat. Before Harrigan could get Roger Carey warmed up and send him in to relieve Houck, the cushions were loaded once more and one of the colored lads had crossed the dish.

Carey stopped it as a solid wall stops a snowflake. He had something that deceived the visitors and sent three of them back from the plate without a hit.

"That cub looks good, Bill," said Sailor Joe. "He canceled their sailing dates pretty quick."

"But they've done too much sailing to suit me," Harrigan returned. "Still McCoy will fold up at any minute now."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE FLYING BAT.

IN the last of the sixth, Harrigan made a switch in his style of attack. The lead-off batter bunted, and beat the throw to first. Another bunt followed, serving as a sacrifice. When the third man also dropped a bunt into the diamond, McCoy had the ball almost as soon as it struck the ground. He didn't throw to first. Instead, he snapped the sphere to third, and the Bluebird runner who was coming up from second was tagged out.

"Using his head," muttered Maroney, nodding.

McCoy fanned the next man who faced him.

"He busted your strategy, Bill," said the scout.

Harrigan swore under his breath.

Roger Carey did careful and clever work in the seventh. Only one colored player reached first, and there he died.

Joe Maroney grinned happily.

"You seem to be having a grand time!" Harrigan shot at the scout.

"Perfectly grand, Bill," answered Maroney. "Too bad you're not!"

"Well, I'm getting something out of it. I guess I've found a pitcher."

"Maybe I've found one myself," muttered Sailor Joe, watching McCoy come in from the field mound.

Carey declined to give the Giants a hit in the eighth.

Desperate now, the Bluebirds did their best to crash through. But they couldn't crash. McCoy wouldn't let them. He worked them deftly, pitching to their weak spots as if he had faced them many times before.

McCoy was the first hitter to face Roger Carey in the first half of the final inning. He missed one, fouled the next, let two go by outside, and smashed the fifth.

The bat rang as he met one of Carey's smokers. Again the sphere sailed and sailed until it dropped outside the fence. Standing, the crowd cheered Slugger as he jogged easily over the cushions and came home.

"A batter as well as a pitcher!" Joe Maroney told himself.

Pale but grim, Carey kept his nerve and refused to let one of the three Giants get to first.

McCoy ascended the hill for the last time. Then, once more, the breaks went against him. Once more the Birds rapped the ball, and once more the overconfident Giants bunched errors. Finally, with two out and two on bases, Slugger seemed to lose control. He walked Bammer Burke.

Harrigan spoke to Faraday, who would follow Burke. "Go in there and sock one, Colt!" snapped the Bluebird manager. "You ain't made a hit off that lad to-day. Where's your 'Babe' Ruth stuff? Put it outer the lot and the score'll be tied."

Faraday knew he hadn't made a hit. He was angry, humiliated. Stepping into the batter's box, he gave McCoy his ugliest look.

"Come on," he said. "Put one over if you dare!"

Slugger smiled. It wasn't exactly a pleasant smile, there was so much grim satisfaction in it. "I passed Burke to get at you, because you're such a complete false alarm," he remarked.

The blood rushed into Faraday's head. He missed the first ball, which broke over the inside corner. He rubbed a hand quickly across his eyes, and set his teeth. A foul followed, which made the second strike.

"Now he'll waste one," Faraday told himself.

McCoy delivered a drop, also over the inside corner. The big batsman chased the ball down below his knees in a desperate effort to hit it—to foul it at least—and missed again. An instant later, having taken two steps into the diamond, he hurled his bat, spinning, at McCoy's head.

CHAPTER XIV.

HE SIGNS ON THE DOTTED LINE.

AGILE as a panther, McCoy leaped sidewise, ducking. The whirling club swished past him. He snapped erect, his lips peeled back from his white teeth, his face transformed.

No longer was it a calm, coolly smiling face—the attractive face of a civilized human being. In a single instant it had become twisted, corrugated, gnarled, wicked, and deadly—the face of a savage. The slitted eyes were the eyes of Belial. He advanced.

Snarling an oath, Bill Harrigan rushed forth from the bench, with Dugan, Tomlin, and Dunn no more than a jump behind him. Bammer Burke, roaring, came rushing up from first. Harrigan's hooklike fingers gripped Faraday's neck.

"You fool!" burst from the indignant manager. "What in hell d'ya think you're trying to do?"

Faraday was surrounded by the exasperated members of his own team.

"Take your paws off me, Bill!" he panted. "Lemme go! I'll knock the head off him!"

"Let him go!" said a voice that nobody recognized as the voice of McCoy, it was so changed, so fearsomely harsh and shocking.

"There'll be no scrap here!" declared Harrigan, maintaining his hold on the right fielder. "Keep that lad away!" he ordered the near-by players.

They got between McCoy and Faraday.

"You know I don't stand for any-

thing like this, Colt," said the manager of the Bluebirds. "It's going to cost you something."

"I don't care what it costs!" returned Faraday, furiously. "One sock at his mug'll be worth it!"

"I'll sock you myself if you don't head for the bench!" warned Harrigan. "Get going! Go on!" There was an ache in Bill's clenched fist, for which Faraday's jaw seemed to exert a powerful pull.

Dugan grasped Colt's arm and marched him toward the bench.

Harrigan swung round and stared into McCoy's face. Then his eyes measured the pitcher to his feet and came back to his face. "I'm going to see you later," said the manager, then turned to follow Faraday.

The colored ball players had wisely and sensibly kept out of the argument. Now the manager of the Giants hastened to congratulate McCoy, who was gazing after Colt Faraday.

Slugger reluctantly withdrew his eyes from Faraday's back. His face relaxed slowly and smoothed out.

"Thanks," he said in a low, steady voice.

"Now I want to pay you for pitching this game for——"

"Nothing doing, Anthony. All I asked were my expenses, and I'll take nothing more. I had to have a chance to show Harrigan what I could do. This was the only way I could get it. I'm much obliged. I'll leave this suit for you according to our arrangements. I wish you good luck, and a prosperous season for the Giants."

CHAPTER XV.

CRAZY LIKE A FOX.

AS McCoy was turning away, he felt the grip of a hand on his arm. Sailor Joe Maroney was at his elbow, grinning.

"Maybe some day you'll be a ball

pitcher, son," allowed the scout. "I'd like to talk cold turkey to you. This ain't the place. I'm stopping at the Magnolia. Let's hoist our mud hooks."

McCoy's eyes searched him. "What's the idea?"

"Business, I told you. Baseball. Mit Budlong suggested I look you over. I've looked. You want to break into the big game? Well, I'm going to show you how you can do it."

"You're scouting for Budlong?"

"Yes."

"All right. I'm ready to listen. Let me speak to a friend before I go."

Slugger looked for Roger Carey and found him about to leave the field. His sister had come down from the stand and joined him. She was saying something to Dodo Dunn as McCoy came up.

"Your mistake was in trying to sneak that straight smoker over on me, old man," said Slugger to Roger Carey. "I was watching for it."

Carey shrugged. "Never mind," he replied. "I guess I made as good a showing as anybody—except you. You've improved considerably since you left college. Sorry you've queered yourself with Harrigan."

"So you think I've queered myself? Well, maybe so. Time will tell. I want you to do me a favor."

Roger hesitated. "All right," he agreed.

"I'm going to the Magnolia now to talk business with a scout for the Buddies. If Harrigan happens to ask about me, tell him I'm there, will you?"

"Why—yes, of course," said Carey, an odd look on his face. "I wish you luck with the Buddies, old man."

"Thanks. Maybe I'll see you later, Roger."

"Maybe."

McCoy noticed the coolness in his friend's manner. He realized regretfully that envy and perhaps a little fear had awakened in Roger's heart.

Turning, Slugger's eyes met those of Nancy. For a moment only. In that moment he felt the sting of her pitying contempt. She went on talking to Dunn. McCoy walked away, his teeth tightly set. But he smiled. Events must take their course.

A few moments later Harrigan, inquiring for McCoy, was surprised to find the winning pitcher had departed. Bill appeared a little disturbed.

"Where the devil has McCoy gone?" he asked.

If Roger Carey heard the question, he failed to answer it.

Meanwhile Slugger, having changed from the playing suit of the Giants to his own clothes, was on his way to the Magnolia Hotel in company with Maroney. They were soon "talking cold turkey" in the scout's room.

The ball player seemed not very interested. Sailor Joe cast his bait cleverly, wondering why the fish didn't jump at the hook. He was still wondering at the end of an hour. Then the door flew open, and Bill Harrigan came in.

"What ya trying to do, Maroney?" barked the manager of the Bluebirds. "Stealing this lad off me?"

Maroney stood up indignantly. "How do you get that way, Bill?" he demanded. "Since when has he belonged to you?"

Harrigan turned to the young pitcher. "Have you made any agreement with Maroney, McCoy?"

"Not yet," was the answer.

"Then you won't!" Old Bill wheeled on the scout again. "Damned fine business, coming down here and trying to cop off a lad right from under my nose!" he growled. "I didn't think it of you. Where's your ethics?"

"What in hell are them?" shouted Sailor Joe, looking as if he were about to explode. "Nobody ever showed me any."

"You wouldn't know what to do with

'em if they did," sneered Harrigan. "You ain't built right."

"Now lay to—lay to right where you are!" roared the sailor. "A little more of that stuff, and I'll come aboard of you!"

"Come on!" invited the manager. "Come on, and we'll go to the planks right here!"

"We had a talk yesterday——" began Maroney.

"And you told me you wasn't up to any scuttling tricks!" reminded Harrigan.

"Since when have you had any claims on this boy?"

"Since quite a while."

"Well, you didn't tell me about it," Maroney returned.

"If you didn't know it, what was the idea yanking him off the field in such a hurry after the game and rushing him here to tie him up? If it hadn't been for Dodo Dunn, I'd never known what was going on till probably too late."

"Dunn!" said McCoy in surprise. "Didn't Roger Carey tell you where to find me?"

"Not so anybody could notice it. Dunn told me."

"Then I guess Carey didn't know you wanted to find me."

"Guess again," said Harrigan. "They all knew it. I was asking what had become of you."

"That's queer," muttered Slugger, frowning.

"There's plenty of queer stuff going on around here," growled Harrigan, scowling at Maroney, who glared back at him. "But I sure didn't reckon on this old cheese trying to slip a fast one by me under pretense of making a friendly visit."

"Now stow that kind of gab!" advised Sailor Joe, still hotly resentful. "I told you what brought me down here. I told you I was cruising in search of a lad that had sort of gone off the chart. Well, this Slugger Mc-

Coy is him, and I was after him first. Just because he happened to pitch against your tin-canners to-day and made them look all moldy, that don't give you no claim on him, Mr. Harrigan."

"Wait a minute!" Bill requested. "Maybe you did go after him first, but I was the first one to dicker with him. He's been round here the last two weeks or more, and we've talked business a number of times. That lets you out, Mr. Maroney."

The statement gave Maroney a jolt. "Is that right?" he asked McCoy.

"Of course it's right!" snapped the manager of the Bluebirds. "I said it! You don't have to ask him."

The subject of the controversy had been quick to perceive that fate had dealt him some excellent cards. He now decided to play them for what they were worth.

"It's correct that I came here to Margalo to get a try-out with the Bluebirds," McCoy agreed. "I made the trip strictly on my own. Mr. Harrigan didn't know a thing about it until I arrived. Then, because I failed to answer certain personal questions to his satisfaction, he declined to let me show him what I could do. In fact, he informed me that he was through with me, and practically threw me out of his room."

"Which spikes your bluff, Bill!" whooped Sailor Joe delightedly. "You ain't even got as much as a wooden leg left to stand on. The boy's mine to take on!"

"Now wait just a little, both of you," said Slugger. "Has it occurred to you that I may have something to say about it?"

"Huh?" grunted Maroney.

"You?" blurted Harrigan.

"Oh, yes." McCoy smiled. "I may have a preference, you know."

"Well, I'll be swamped!" muttered the scout.

Harrigan had a sudden conviction that he knew which one Slugger would favor, and a faint grin slipped across his face and vanished. "He's sort of got us fanning the breezes, Joe," he said. "I guess we've got to let him take his pick."

Now the scout felt that McCoy's resentment over the manner in which he had been met by Harrigan would lead him to turn the manager of the Bluebirds down. Maroney agreed to leave the decision to Slugger.

"Well then," said Maroney, "here we are, lad. Which are you going to hook up to? Of course you know what it'll mean to you to get onto a club that finished in second place last season and intends to do better this. It'll take Bill two-three years to hoist his crew out through the hatch and get on deck. Fall on my neck and be happy."

"I'm ready to listen to what you both have to offer," said the ball player coolly. "Make your bids, gentlemen."

Harrigan gulped dryly with an expression of distress. This was a twist he hadn't expected. "What's that?" he asked scowling. "What d'ya think you're going to do, auction yourself off to us?"

"Why, I was thinking maybe I'd accept the best bid—yes." McCoy wore a naïve expression.

"Hell's bells!" shouted Bill. "It ain't done in our set! Nobody bids up the price of a busher just outer the sticks. Who d'you think you are, anyhow?"

"Why, I believe I'm the person who let your Bluebirds down with just three hits to-day, and one of those came from a misjudged fly, while another was a bunt that could have been fielded. Am I wrong?"

"Your nut'll need to be poulticed if it gets any worse! Two weeks from now that same bunch would murder you in one inning."

"Now and then the best in the busi-

ness are murdered in one inning, Mr. Harrigan, and I know I'm not yet the best."

"Not yet—but soon! That's the way you figger it! Wow, but you're a conceited bird!"

"The trouble with you, Mr. Harrigan, is that you want me to put on a lot of false modesty. Modesty, nine times out of ten, is hypocrisy. I'm no fool. I know I'm a greenhorn who has plenty to learn, but I also know I can pitch well enough to fool your Bluebirds and make your heaviest slugger so mad he throws his bat at my head.

"Now let's talk business if we're going to," McCoy went on. "I'm listening."

Seeing the looks which passed between Harrigan and Maroney, Slugger had a little trouble to keep a straight face. The situation had a humorous aspect for him, however they might regard it. Flushed and sweating from every pore, old Bill got out a handkerchief and mopped his face. Sailor Joe scratched his chin.

"If you'd kept away, you old cuttlefish," said Harrigan to the scout, "this wouldn't have happened."

"And it wouldn't have happened if you'd knew enough to grab a good thing when it was passed to you on a platter," retorted Sailor Joe, just as courteously.

"Well, go ahead!" snapped Bill. "Whatever you say, I'm going to top you till you get through making a fool of yourself."

Maroney made an offer, and Harrigan promptly offered more. This was repeated twice before Harrigan said:

"Name your top and get it out of your system, you pest! I need pitchers more'n Mit Budlong does."

"By that," said the scout regretfully, "I suppose you're going to bid over me anyhow. If that's the case, I'm through. I'd never gone as far as I have, only Mit lets me use my judg-

ment in any case. I'm sorry to pass this lad up, but I guess he's yourn, Bill."

"Then that's settled!" Harrigan heaved a sigh of relief.

"Not yet," said McCoy, to the surprise of both men. "The money's all kayo, but there's something else to be considered."

"You don't tell us!" gasped Bill, his eyes very wide. "Whisper it soft so's not to give me too much of a shock. My nerves are all shot now."

"I want something put into the contract that I know isn't in the usual contract."

Again Harrigan and Maroney looked at each other.

"Enjoy yourself, Bill!" said Maroney, with a grin.

"Spit it out!" Bill growled at McCoy. "What is it?"

"You must agree not to farm me out or sell me to any other team," replied the pitcher.

Harrigan tottered to a chair and sat down heavily. Again he got out his handkerchief and used it to remove the perspiration from his face. "What if I don't agree to that?" he asked with astonishing mildness.

"Then I won't sign the contract."

There was a moment of silence.

"One of them astrologer guys told me that this was going to be a big week for me," said Bill presently. "He was right. First exhibition game my team plays it gets licked. Then the pitcher puts himself up at auction and I get stung with him. And after that he dictates terms to me before he'll put his John Hancock on the dotted line of a Bluebird contract! Big? It's a wow!"

He sighed. "But what if I can't put that into the contract, McCoy?" he asked.

"There's got to be such an agreement before you'll see me write my name as 'party of the second part.'"

"But not in the contract. We have

a regular form that we don't alter. It allows me to hand you your release any time my judgment says you're no good to me."

"I understand that, but——"

"For the other thing, you'll have to take my word. Maroney, here, is a witness that I promise not to farm you out or sell you to any other team."

"That's entirely satisfactory, Mr. Harrigan. You've hired a pitcher. Bring on your contract."

Later, Slugger signed the document in Harrigan's room, with Maroney and Dodo Dunn as witnesses.

"There, you infernal mule!" said Harrigan. "I hope you're satisfied!"

"And I hope you will be," said McCoy affably.

CHAPTER XVI.

READY TO KILL.

THE homing flight of the Bluebirds began very late in March. They winged their way northward in company with Mit Budlong's Buddies, stopping along the way to play exhibition games.

Slugger McCoy was growing uneasy and dissatisfied. Day after day he saw Bill Harrigan trying out rookies. Harrigan gave one or more of his new men a chance to show their stuff in every game. Day after day McCoy held down the bench without being called upon.

He warmed up faithfully and regularly. He pitched to his teammates when they were at batting practice—merely threw straight balls over the rubber to let them "get their eyes on the pill." But he yearned in vain to hear his manager say:

"Peel your sweater and get out there. It's your turn to-day."

Would his turn never come? Slugger McCoy kept asking himself that question.

In games with the Southern teams,

before the northward flitting, Bill two or three times had permitted Slugger to work for an inning or two. Never throughout an entire game.

Abrim with energy and ambition the young pitcher chafed under the restraint. He became almost sullenly resentful.

There was another reason for his dark mood. While he had been surprised to see Roger Carey betray jaundice, his mind now dwelt more regretfully upon Nancy, her attitude toward him, and her genuine or pretended admiration of Faraday. Even the suspicion that she might be faking a penchant for the big outfielder didn't allay Slugger's irritation whenever he saw her with Faraday, which was often.

McCoy was certain Colt Faraday was a rotter. The young pitcher felt Nancy was too fine and lovely a girl to associate with Faraday. He just knew the man was a mongrel dog, and that was all there was to it.

How Nancy could tolerate the fellow was beyond Slugger's understanding. For she was a girl of family, of refinement, of splendid social standing. Hitherto, she had chosen her men friends with discrimination.

Now, however, Faraday, evidently not a gentleman, was often her escort. Unless she was pretending for the purpose of hurting McCoy, there seemed to be only one explanation of her caprice. The possibility of that explanation being true filled Slugger's soul with apprehension close to panic. And it made him fighting mad.

McCoy wanted to smash Faraday, having no doubt of his ability to do the job thoroughly well. Unrestrained, he would have had it out to a finish. Often he visualized himself thrashing the man into abject submission, doing it repeatedly if necessary, and then warning him that he would kill him if he ever as much as turned his eyes in Nancy Carey's direction again.

An obstacle stood in the way. Harrigan had notified McCoy that he would be fired instanter from the Bluebirds if he made the slightest offensive move toward Faraday, or provoked the right fielder by even a word or a look. To be fired from the Bluebirds meant that McCoy wouldn't be on hand to protect Nancy in a crisis, if the crisis came.

Harrigan had told Faraday, as well, what would happen to him if he didn't "lay off" McCoy. Faraday was aware of Harrigan's reputation for keeping his word. So the outfielder carried himself as if McCoy wasn't on earth.

"Prob'ly I'm making a fool of myself," said the Bluebirds' manager to Dodo Dunn. "Prob'ly I ought to lock the pair of them up in a room and let them go to it. I guess I was a bonehead to take McCoy on to the team at all, but I couldn't let Mit Budlong send a scout to cop maybe a good thing off right from under my nose. If the boy did turn out good, I knew Mit would give me a razz for being such a dumb-bell as to let him get away."

One day, unable to keep still longer, McCoy said to Bill: "Are you ever going to let me go in there and do some real pitching, Mr. Harrigan? My arm is withering away for need of work."

"Don't be so urgent, son," returned the manager calmly. "You're in school now, and learning your lessons. You'll be called on to recite later. If you ain't learnt anything, maybe you'll be suspended or expelled."

"This Buddie bunch is the bunch I want to give all the trouble I can this season, and you're getting a fine chance to study 'em. If you've got a bean on your shoulders, you'll have their hitting style all sized up and jotted down on the tablets of your memory before this trip's over."

Slugger had been watching the stick work of the Buddies all along, taking mental notes of each man's strong and weak points. Whenever any one of

them crashed out a hit, McCoy knew just the kind of a ball that man had leaned against, and he made a mental note of it.

When one of them was fooled more than once in a game by a certain kind of ball, he remembered that also. He knew the ones who liked speed, and those who were bothered most by a change of pace. He believed that already he could face them on the hill and acquit himself with credit.

Why not? Roger Carey had done it. Roger had been given his chance. Though the Bluebirds had lost the game by a single tally, that hadn't been Roger's fault. Carey had allowed less hits than the opposing pitcher. He had issued only one pass, while his opponent had given three.

A "boot" and an error of judgment had caused the defeat of the Bluebirds. The Buddies had been presented with the game. Bill Harrigan had spoken discreet words of approval to Carey when it was over.

McCoy wasn't selfishly envious of Roger. What irked him was Harrigan's delay in giving him the same sort of a chance. He went to Roger and congratulated him.

"Now don't be facetious!" Carey retorted. "I know I didn't win the game."

"You ought to know I'm not trying that stuff, Roge," said Slugger. "You'd have won it with better support."

"Thanks," said Roger, turning away.

McCoy's teeth snapped together. His eyes, beneath knitted brows, shot a long, steady look at Carey's slim back. Then his face relaxed. After all, the slight was unimportant.

March blustered out and April came in, weeping conventionally, with the Bluebirds still moving homeward in short hops.

Faraday was busting the ball. His batting eye was all there, and he was exhibiting more smashing, slugging

force than ever before in his life. Any pitcher who could keep him from wanging the old apple over the fences of the smallish parks in which the teams played was charged with carrying a rabbit's foot.

The crowds came out in full expectation of seeing Colt do it. Always the feat was followed by that roar from human throats which has been the involuntary tribute to every great gladiator since the days of the Grecian games and the Roman arena.

The sports writers who were covering the exhibition games between the Bluebirds and the Buddies made a to-do over Faraday. No day passed that his name didn't appear in their comments. They predicted that he would have the greatest batting season of his career. He threatened, they said, to smash the home-run record made by Ruth—to make a record that would stand for all time.

It was really a thrill-giving sight to see him swing on the ball and crash it. Into the swing, free and wide, he put the driving force and the weight of his body, "carrying through" like a golfer, and turning on the balls of his feet. His big bat rang when it met the leather. Smitten fairly, the ball left the bat too fast for the eye to follow it at first, and seemed to make a whitish streak in the air.

Nancy Carey's interest in him wasn't inexplicable—or even very strange. No woman could watch him in action at the plate without being interested, and any thorough fan of the fair sex was bound to feel fascination. Nancy, naturally, was a fan. Solicitation for her brother had made her one.

Harrigan, knowing the box-office value to any club of a great home-run clouter, to say nothing of his run-getting value, felt a business tenderness for Faraday. He had no particular liking for him in any other way. Business was business with Bill. He had a

hard, grim way of excluding sentiment from his business relationships.

Had anybody suggested to Bill in the days of that northward journey that Slugger McCoy might some time rival Faraday in the popular esteem of the fans and as an all-around asset to the team, Bill would have informed the would-be seer that he was cuckoo.

The journey was drawing toward its end, to be followed by a few exhibition games on the home lot before the pennant race began, when something happened that filled Slugger McCoy's soul with wrath and alarm. One evening as he was loitering in the lobby of the hotel at which the Bluebirds had put up, he saw Faraday and Nancy Carey come down together in the elevator.

Nancy was wearing a wrap over her evening gown. Faraday wore a dress suit. A taxi, previously called, was waiting outside. Faraday escorted Nancy through the lobby and out to the taxi. While McCoy stared like a thunderstruck fool, the taxi bore them away.

Nibs Meadows came up and spoke to Slugger. "I dunno how it can be so," said Nibs, "but Colt's sure landed that classy little damsel. He passed me the wink as he sailed out with her."

McCoy, without a word, whirled and walked swiftly into a hotel elevator.

Roger Carey was in his room, getting ready to go out. There was a singular flush in his face. He looked like a person in an exalted state of self-satisfaction. A quick frown puckered his brow when Slugger entered without knocking.

"Perhaps you weren't ready to leave when they did and you're going to join them as soon as you can," said McCoy.

"Eh?" exclaimed Carey. "Who are you talking about?"

"Your sister and that—and Faraday. I saw them leave the hotel together and take a taxi just now."

"Well, what about it? Colt's taken Nancy to a show."

"Are you going to join them later?" McCoy asked.

"I am not! I've got something else on to-night."

"Do you mean to tell me that you've knowingly and willingly let your sister go out alone with that man?"

"Of course. Why not?"

"You're crazy! You're going to regret this!"

Roger stiffened. There was an odd brightness in his eyes, a peculiar glimmer. He gave McCoy a look of anger.

"What the hell do you mean by coming in here and talking to me like this?" he cried sharply. "What business is it to you?"

"There's something wrong with you, Carey," returned Slugger, his pulses hammering. "But I don't know what it is. Your sister knows there's something wrong with you, and that's why she's here—that's what took her south with you. She went to look out for

you, but now you're not looking out for her—and she needs it.

"She needs protection, man!" McCoy went on. "I'm amazed that you don't seem to realize it. I'm amazed that you should allow her to have anything to do with that fellow she's with to-night. Instead of throwing her into his company, you ought to be standing between them with a gun to keep him away."

Roger, his face gone saffron pale, tried to interrupt. McCoy's words poured forth like lava from a volcano, scorching, searing, blistering. Without restraint, he flayed Carey with his tongue, and the amazed fellow recoiled before the shock of it.

"But if that beast harms Nancy," Slugger finished in a voice as hard as Bessemer steel, "I'll kill him!"

The following installment of this baseball serial will appear in the next issue of **TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE**, on the news stands June 15th.

NEW NAVIGATION

IN the field of applied science there is something new under the sun almost every day. Recently, an "electric track" has been developed that will enable ships to go in and out of harbors in the thickest, foggiest weather. By means of the "track" a blindfolded helmsman could follow the channel.

The electric track consists of a cable laid down the center of the harbor channel. A continuous high-frequency current of small value is sent through this cable. This current induces a similar frequency in a coil carried by a steamer. The helmsman hears a high-pitched buzz, like a wireless signal, which tells him when he is over the cable.

This cable can be installed on a pole line for similar use in guiding airplanes. France already has such a line in use for aircraft, but although the practicability of the electric track has been proved, it has not yet been installed for either steamers or aircraft in the United States.

The installation of the electric cable in the harbors of the world would probably do away with the present expensive pilot system. Each harbor would have two cables, one for outgoing ships, and one for those coming in. The respective cables would carry a differently pitched signal. The helmsman, on reaching port, would switch on his coil, put on his headphones, and steer by sound. The only possible collisions would be those dead ahead, with vessels going in the same direction. By the use of the track, fog-bound ships would not have to wait for days at a harbor entrance.

A Talk With You

News and Views by the
Editors and Readers

JUNE 1, 1929

Read the announcement concerning our next issue, at the bottom of this page. Then tell your news dealer to put aside a copy for you!

PEOPLE of the theater, those who are in "show business," are interesting and glamorous folk. In "How Many Knives," the complete novel in our next issue, by Earl W. and Marion Scott, you'll have a chance to see these people without make-up, being them-

selves, as they are caught in a baffling mystery.

A big automobile bus, filled with show people, picks up a passenger on a lonely road. Then astonishing events begin to happen. There is an isolated house, near the road, where startling developments occur. All in all, "How Many Knives" has more unusual qualities than we've had in a complete novel for months.

Also in our next issue will be another "Syncopatin' Kid" story, by Vic Whitman. It's called "Sweet Adeline," because that favorite song of street-corner quartets plays a big part in the plot. As usual, the Syncopatin' Kid

In the next issue of

TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE

On the news stands June 15th.

How Many Knives *by* EARL W. and MARION SCOTT
A novel of show people and a baffling mystery.

Paid in Adventure *by* LAURENCE J. CAHILL
Another stirring adventure of Hallet, "the Lucky."

Female of the Species *by* FRANK E. CARSON
A humorous baseball story that's different.

The Indispensable Corporal *by* SAMUEL TAYLOR MOORE
An air-war story of airplanes and balloons, and the men who risked their lives in them.

Sweet Adeline *by* VIC WHITMAN
The Syncopatin' Kid tickles a piano—and how!—and does some detective work.

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YOU—AND YOUR CAREER

A Department for Ambitious Men

by JOHN HAMPTON

struts his stuff on the piano, and gets tangled in a cross-current of present-day life.

HAVE you read "Hallet, the Lucky," in this issue of "our magazine" yet? If not, turn back and read it now. Another episode in the action-filled career of this nonchalant adventurer will be published in our next number. "Paid in Adventure" is its title. The author, Laurence J. Cahill, has promised us more stories about Dudley Hallet.

We'll have a golf story in the coming issue, a war story of balloons and soldiers, that exclusive department, "You—And Your Career," and other good things. Right now, we'd appreciate your comments on this issue of the magazine.

REG DINSMORE, who wrote "What Price Justice," the novel in this issue, was asked to write something about himself. Also, we asked for his picture. You'll find a pen-and-ink drawing to the right. Here's what he has to say:

To begin with, I love the woods. I couldn't write about them otherwise. You see, I was born on a farm that was bordered by beautiful forests. I was hunting with bow and arrow and building brush wigwams in those woods before other children of my age were allowed to leave the dooryard, unattended. For weeks, months, yes, years, I prowled those fine old woods until many of their secrets became to me much more commonplace and far more interesting than the multiplication tables in my school arithmetic.

The familiar woodlands near the old home farm were a joyful playground but sometimes, when I chance to climb to the top of some high hill, I could see, far back to the north, blue, forested mountains, gleaming lakes.

Ah, what glamorous daydreams those were! The snug cabins I would build beside those sparkling lakes. The graceful canoes, the beautiful guns that should be mine. Wonderful hunting dogs that, when the day's hunt was done, should edge close in the camp-fire light and lay their knowing heads in my laps.

Glossy pelts of mink, fisher, and fox, taken by my own traps. Friends, woodsmen, bronzed of skin, clear of eye, understanding of heart, who should share the joy of the great outdoors with me. Such were my childhood dreams.

My boyhood dreams came true.

I don't mean that overnight I came into such fabulous good fortune. But with the passing of years, and by dint of much hard work, I accumulated experiences and things of which I had dreamed as a boy.

Stored up in my memory are woods experiences which, to me, are priceless. Friends I have such as even the roseate ideals of my boyhood never pictured; I'd be proud to have you meet them. Dogs I have owned, something like fifty-odd of them, all hunting dogs. I now have a pair of English setters that do almost everything but talk. Cabins? Yes, six of them, scattered in excellent hunting and fishing country. Guns? Of course, nearly a dozen, and good enough for any man.



Although I hope I appreciate the good things that have come my way, I fear—yes, and hope—that I will never be quite satisfied. I have too much yet to learn, too many new places to see, too many people to meet who may become valued friends, to sit smugly down and contentedly twiddle my thumbs.

No one man has yet more than scratched the surface of woods lore, you know. The quest for more of this kind of knowledge will keep me joyfully busy until I am handed my ticket to the happy hunting grounds.

REG DINSMORE.

TN-9A



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"I'd walk a mile
for a Camel."

"So would I."

